

DELLA DARE

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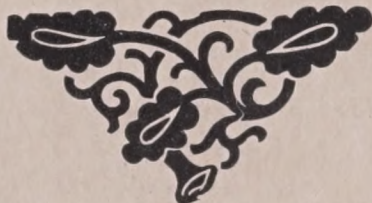
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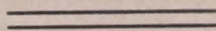
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By EVA L. DUNNING

Author of

TROSY



PRICE TWENTY-FIVE CENTS

DELLA DARE

AND OTHER STORIES

By EVA L. DUNNING

Author of "TROS Y"

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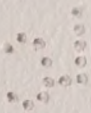
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TO MY BROTHER AND SISTER
DELNO AND MAY
THIS BOOK IS TENDERLY DEDICATED



~~\$0.25~~
SEP 21 1916

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no. 1.

DELLA DARE

I.

THE STRANGE WOMAN.

A clear sky looked down on the small farm in the valley, and bright rays of light penetrated windows and doors of the small farmhouse near the village of Kent.

"Della, Della Dare!" cried a shrill voice within, "where are you, child? Come here with your books instantly."

"Ha, ha!" rang a peal of silver sounding mirth, that brought Aunt Matilda quickly to the door, together with the sound of galloping hoofs.

"Ha, ha! Aunt Matilda—no more horrid books today, for Guido and I are in for a gay long gallop."

And turning her radiant face back upon her aunt, and waving her whip in defiance, she tossed her bright locks to the wind, and galloped off down the dusty village lane.

"Oh, dear, oh dear!" murmured Aunt Matilda, wringing her hands, and gazing after the form disappearing in the shadow of the trees, "she'll break her neck some day!"

"The little venturesome imp!" she ejaculated.

"I'll shake the breath out of her when she returns!"

"She cares nothing for books—only to gallop thru the woods and lanes mounted upon Guido's back."

What a lovely little body she was, as she lifted that sunny face in defiance—the face of a child of scarcely ten years, radiant with health and beauty, gifted with a rare expression of intellect, a delicate oval shape with a complexion wondrously fair, tinted with a color that deepened in her cheeks almost to a glowing crimson. The lips full and red, eyes, clear and gray, over arched with slender brows, the bright gold rings of hair floating on the breeze—all were extremely beautiful as they flashed in the sunlight, in strange contrast to the pale stern features of Aunt Matilda.

As was her wont, Della was now flying thru the woods, and coming under the shadow of a sycamore, she paused a moment, while Guido drank from a small running brook. The pet horse having quenched his thirst, she gathered up her reins for a fresh gallop, when her ear caught the sound of foot-steps; and looking back, she saw approaching her a strange woman, whose strange magnetic fascination held her gaze. She had been sitting upon the edge of the stream, a few yards distant watching the little one intently, seated so majestically upon her fine black horse.

The stranger was robed in a neat costume of black and white, a fanciful hat partially covering her raven tresses. The fair face was that of a woman not more than eight and twenty years.

A sunny smile spread her classic features as her eyes met those of the child.

She beckoned her without a word to dismount, and Della obeying an inexplicable impulse, tied her horse to a limb of the sycamore, came forward, and seated herself by her side under the shade of the wide spreading branches. She displayed no fear as the woman caressed her cheek, and looked earnestly into her gray eyes.

"What is your name?" she suddenly asked.

"Della Dare."

"Della," the woman repeated, musingly. "No one but a mother would give her darling such a pretty name."

"I heard my aunt say that the name was given me by my father," answered Della, quietly.

"Your father?" absently. Unconsciously the woman dropped the small hand, a faint red surged thru her pale cheek, then faded away into ghastly pallor.

Della started up in alarm.

"Are you ill?" she interrogated.

"I am tired and hungry, little one,—and do you love your parents, Della?"

"I know nothing of them," was the strange reply.

"I have no one at home, but Aunt Matilda, and she is so cross, I can not love her. I fancy she hates me at times."

"Then you are not happy here?"

"No," said Della, her eyes filling with tears, "I do not like Aunt Matilda—I want my mother."

"Della," said the strange woman, "I want you to come with me—you will be a happier child."

Della could not repress the joy rising in her heart, tho she cast a plaintive glance at Guido.

"The horse will find his way home if you unloose him, will he not, Della?"

"Yes," was the quick response, "he knows the way home as well as I do, but Guido and I have been such warm friends," she said, striving to control the struggle in her bosom at thought of leaving him.

"I will take you to a better and lovelier home," said the woman earnestly.

As Della's eyes rested once again on the face full of silent entreaty, she forgot the claims of Aunt Matilda, her warm friendship for Guido,—forgot everything but the strange power of this fascinating woman.

Led by some irresistible force, she set the horse free, and while Guido was galloping home, she returned and said, "I will go."

Glancing hurriedly around, the woman grasped the hand of the child, and walked rapidly away.

II.

CLARINDENE.

Raye Fraser had amassed a large fortune and purchased a magnificent estate called Clarindene.

He had no wife nor children to share his riches, or inherit them. He was alone in the world with the exception of his orphaned nephew whom he had adopted, and who long since regarded himself as his rich uncle's heir.

It was rumored one time that Raye Fraser was enamored of the beautiful blonde woman who suddenly came to an untimely death; and since then his heart had not been touched by artful women. He was now past sixty years of age and his once dark hair was fast turning gray.

He was sitting in his handsome library, buried in a favorite book, when the door opened, and a servant announced, that a woman wished to see him.

"Show her in," was the somewhat stern command. The bright day was waning, and a soft breeze was playing with the blue tinted curtains that were drawn aside, and sweeping across the richly colored carpet.

The woman soon entered leading by the hand a fair beautiful child.

At the sound of his name, Raye Fraser came forward, and clasped the woman's hand in a momentary cordial pressure.

"You have not forgotten me?" she said.

"I can never forget the debt of gratitude I owe you," he answered promptly.

"Raye Fraser," she said, in a steady tone, "I have come to claim the payment of that debt."

He looked at her inquiringly.

She answered the unspoken question by glancing proudly at the child.

"You have no wife nor children," she uttered.

"Would you not like to take this child whose parents have long since neglected, and give her a father's love?"

"I have no wish to be burdened with care," he faltered.

"You are rich, Raye Fraser, and can afford to rear this child. It would be a noble deed."

The woman looked at him with pleading eyes.

"Can you not take care of her better than I?" he asked.

"I will bestow upon you or her a liberal amount of money."

"I can not!" she cried, averting her eyes.

"You have denied an earnest woman's request. I have nothing more to say. Come, Della."

"Della!" he gasped to himself, as the sound of that sacred name fell on his ear, and softened his heart. "Stay!" he cried, with sudden gesture.

The woman and child turned.

"I will take her," he said, advancing, a ray of pleasure lighting his countenance, "and do the best I can for her."

"You will be happy in this beautiful place, Della," the woman whispered bending over her.

"I don't know," returned the child clinging to her hand while tears rolled rapidly down her cheeks. "I do not want to leave you."

The woman led her to one side, and talked to her in low caressing tones. Della dried her eyes, and made a brave little effort to smile.

"Be kind to her," she entreated, again at the gentleman's side, "and accept my deepest gratitude."

"Her name is Della Dare."

She drew the little one again to her bosom, kissed the sweet lips, and then glided out, and was gone.

And Della, awed and trembling, was alone with the sad faced master of Clarindene.

He gazed at his new charge a few seconds, drinking in the loveliness of her fair face; then touched a silver bell.

Aleck again appeared.

"Send the house-keeper to me," he said with something like kindness in his tone.

The house-keeper was a sweet faced matronly woman who came in a moment later, and in silence awaited her master's orders.

"Mrs. Belford," said Raye Fraser, "this little girl is Della Dare who will reside with us hereafter. I wish her to be treated as my daughter. Give her a pleasant room, and attend to her wardrobe." "This is all," he ended, resuming his reading.

Taking Della by the hand, she quietly withdrew, and led her up the broad stair-case to a bright cheerful room whose large windows commanded a fine view of the long avenue of trees.

"You're a pretty little girl," the house-keeper declared, kissing her rosy cheek, after she had given her a refreshing bath, and brushed out her golden tresses.

"No more gloom in this house with you in it, child," she laughed, turning her gently around.

Della smiled, and thought she was going to be quite happy here attended by such motherly kindness.

Night was coming on, and ere long the weary child was slumbering sweetly in a clean cosy bed; and did not awake until the early sun was peeping in the closely drawn curtains of pink and white.

III.

CHARLES FRASER.

The day was destined to be clear and warm.

Della was awake an hour before Mrs. Belford came in to arrange her morning toilet. She was wondering the while if Aunt Matilda would miss her, and what poor Guido would do for a wild gallop thru the woods.

After completing Della's toilet, Mrs. Belford informed her she was soon to have a maid and a governess. Ten minutes later the little fairy filled with new thoughts and fancies was skipping along over the beautiful green lawn.

So absorbed was she in examining the many blooming flowers, that she did not observe the tall manly figure approaching her.

He was a young man of twenty-one or two with a fair smooth face who stood regarding her with no small degree of surprise and wonder.

The glowing picture inspired him with the feeling of an artist. She was bending over a bright red rose that enhanced the beauty of her golden hair, and lily-white face.

"Who are you?" he queried.

The unexpected voice startled her.

Recovering herself she suddenly raised her head as tho ready for the encounter.

"Who are you?" she sharply demanded, a roguish light coming into her gray orbs.

The young man laughed outright, and removing his becoming hat from his shapely head, made a low obeisance:

"Charles Oliver Fraser, only nephew and heir of Raye Fraser of Clarindene at your service."

"Now," with a merry gleam in his steady gaze, "will you answer my inquiry, and tell me who you are, and why you are here?"

"I shall not tell you everything," was the decisive reply, allowing for a moment a little pout to mar the beauty of her red mouth.

"I am Della Dare, and this is my home, perhaps forever," she added, with the air of a queen.

"Ah," said he, again slightly bowing, "since we are to live under the same roof, I trust we will always be friends."

Della smiled, and not unwillingly placed her little palm in the extended hand of her companion. Charles held it for an instant and looked down into her lovely face with grave tender eyes.

The breakfast bell then sounded, and they started for the house together.

Raye Fraser had been watching their movements for some time, standing in the open doorway, a look of satisfaction on his once handsome face.

"I see you have introduced yourselves," observed the uncle, pleasantly, more to his nephew than to Della as they came up to him smiling, hand in hand.

"I wish to explain," resumed the uncle, "that this is a little protege of mine who will reside with us hereafter."

Charles, his only nephew and heir, was spending his summer vacation at home.

In a year he would graduate from college, and then embrace the privilege and pleasure of an extended tour.

During the progress of the meal, Della was listening with rapt attention while Charles was relating some of his lively anecdotes of college life and customs.

The presence of Della at Clarindene was like rays of sunlight illumining the once dreary home.

The master soon began to regard her as his own. Her blonde face, her sprightly, graceful movements ever reminded him of a dearer vision whose fair image bore the same sweet name of Della.

The following week a governess was employed under whose instructions Della soon showed marked improvement in intellect and manner.

Her pretty wardrobe so becoming to a child of her years, and the possession of a maid, rendered her conscious of the fact that in the house of Raye Fraser she was an important personage.

Shortly after Charles had graduated, his uncle sent him on the anticipated pleasure trip.

He wrote quite frequently, filling each letter with spirited descriptions of people he had met, and scenes he had visited,—occasionally, inclosing one to Della, which missives were carefully read and preserved among her choicest treasures.

IV.

THE VISITORS.

Sitting upon the edge of a rock that overlooked a picturesque view was a young girl, the age of sixteen or seventeen stamped upon her placid brow, her hands clasped about her knees, her head bare, her tresses a little loosened by the wind, and her clear, gray orbs fixed upon the distant landscape.

"Ah!" chimed a merry voice behind her, "here you are, and I have searched for you everywhere."

"How you frightened me, Charles Fraser," she exclaimed, springing up, and forcing a smile, her heart beating beyond control, and a deeper red dyeing her cheeks.

"I beg your pardon," said Charles Fraser, breaking out into a gay laugh.

"Indeed, Della, I did not mean to frighten you. I only came to tell you, this is the day we expect our visitors. I thought probably you might have forgotten."

"No," she murmured, absently, "I have not forgotten, but have been wondering for hours what they are like, and would I admire them."

The master of the house had announced at dinner a week ago, that his brother's step-children, a son and a daughter from Hartford would make their appearance at Clarindene on this date for a visit of thirty days or more.

"Florence, they say, is quite a beauty," Charles remarked, as Della and he were walking leisurely down the broad avenue of trees. "I have not seen her for several years," he went on, "but I feel assured you will greatly admire her."

A little shudder ran thru Della's frame, and her face betrayed something of a possible jealousy that might exist in her heart during the visit of Florence Hayden.

"Herman," he continued, "was my room-mate at college, and I often met him while abroad. We have become warm friends indeed. I hope you will like him, for my sake, Della, and treat him in your usual genial manner." "But, Della," he half entreated, slipping his hand tenderly into hers, "I should not wish him to engross your entire attention, for this would disturb the peace that now dwells in the heart of your friend."

At these last words Della averted her eyes with something like dew in them.

They parted on the veranda and Della on reaching her room, found her maid in readiness to assist her in her evening toilet.

The sun had almost set before the inmates of the house caught the sound of rumbling wheels that heralded the approach of the expected visitors.

Raye Fraser and his nephew met them in the hall, and welcomed them most heartily.

"I had begun to fear you were not coming," said the uncle.

"The train was two hours late," returned Herman Hayden, a tall, handsome youth of twenty-three, whose eyes were dark and sparkling with intellect, while over his proud and lofty forehead fell a profusion of dark hair.

Raye Fraser led the way into the parlor, and introduced the young couple to Della, as his ward, who rose at once, and greeted them in her sweet cordial manner.

As her eyes rested upon Florence whose age was probably twenty years, a strange feeling of dread, she could not define came over her.

Miss Hayden's figure was plump and developed, her eyes pale blue, and her hair chestnut with a fiery glow in its under tints. Her voice was not musical, but had in it a touch of harshness.

During the few seconds of silence that followed, the brother's eyes were fixed immovable on the fresh beauty of Della's child-like face.

The evening was spent in music and games, while conversation seemed somewhat constrained.

The next morning Raye Fraser ordered the house-keeper to show Florence about the house and grounds, as he and the young men were going fishing for a few hours. "I wish Della to accompany her, and make her visit as pleasant as possible," he resumed on leaving the room.

Mrs. Belford bowed a hearty willingness, and taking the keys in hand, beckoned to the two girls who overheard his request.

Florence followed her closely, uttering exclamations of surprise and delight, as they passed thru the various rooms filled with costly furniture and pictures of rare loveliness.

"I believe Della can show you over the grounds better than I," the house-keeper said, pleasantly, when they had completed the tour of the house.

Della then led the way out on the lawn, and pointed out the beauties of her favorite flowers that seemed to be constantly blooming afresh.

While they stood watching the silvery winding of the little brook that ran thru the western part of the grounds, Della noted for the first time how strikingly handsome was her companion in daylight, and felt conscious of a sort of sick pain creeping in her heart when she thought how attentive Charles was to her the first hour of her arrival.

"How long have you resided here?" asked Florence.

"Almost six years" was the ready reply, adding, "she never felt lonely at Clarindene."

"I suppose not," sneeringly, "since you have Charles Fraser for companion."

Della shrank from the cold gleam of her eye.

"Yes," said Della, her face growing a trifle pale, "my guardian's nephew has been very kind."

Florence flashed a sharp look at the speaker from under her auburn lashes.

Della fancied there was an angry rebuke, or warning in it, and making a brave effort to master her feelings, called her attention to the cunning squirrel that had carefully seated itself in the recess of one of the tall trees.

But Florence, however, was not to be daunted so easily in her catechism, as the following inquiry may prove.

"Are you in any way related to Raye Fraser?"

"I can claim no relationship," was the rueful response.

"Ah, I suppose you are an orphan, being his ward. Are you an heiress, or entirely dependent on the bounty of Raye Fraser?"

"You had better apply to Raye Fraser for any information you desire on the subject," said Della in clear tones, while a rosy flush swept her agitated features.

"I believe it is time for my lessons," she observed, without waiting for a reply, anxious to conclude the unpleasant conversation. "You will have to excuse me, Miss Hayden," and turning, she walked rapidly away.

"One moment," called Florence, her blue eyes kindled with a taunting expression.

Della turned round as tho compelled from the tone of her harsh voice.

"Do you love Charles Fraser?" with a keen searching glance.

Della's eyes fell under the piercing gaze, and white to the lips, made a mighty struggle to turn again and fly without answering a word.

Miss Hayden looked beyond the little stream into infinite space with a wicked light in her half shut eyes.

"The proud little protege," she muttered between her teeth. "She had better not come between me and my plans of success."

V.

THE ACCIDENT.

Toward noon the fishing party had returned, each carrying a string of fish. So noiseless was their approach in the grass, that Florence did not hear their foot-falls.

Her brother softly advanced and held the result of his fishing close in front of her.

"How you frightened me, Herman Hayden!" she cried, pushing the game from her with sudden force.

A merry peal of laughter rose on the breeze, as she and her brother turned to join the other two.

"Where is Della?" asked Raye Fraser, a shade of annoyance crossing his countenance at the thought of her lack of courtesy in not entertaining his guest.

"She is under instruction," answered Florence, indifferently.

"Ah," said he and his countenance cleared.

They walked thru the familiar path that led to the front veranda, and Charles, stepping round to Florence's side, engaged himself in pleasant conversation, while Herman succeeded in cheering his "uncle" with his boyish remarks.

When Della issued from the library, after her study hour, she felt timid about coming again into the presence of Florence who had already planted within her a strong sense of dread.

Gazing out of the sitting-room window, she discovered to her pleasure that the party of men had returned from their fishing excursion.

Seated upon the veranda that faced the beautiful lawn, they were evidently discussing some important and interesting subject, Florence forming the center of the group.

Her manner was so changed, her face so radiant, that Della half forgot her coldness of an hour ago, and partially overcame her feelings of dread.

She glanced at the marble clock on the carved mantle piece, and was pleased to note it was almost ready to chime the lunch hour.

Having joined the group a moment later, Herman, who was seated near the hall door, rose, and gallantly offered her his chair.

"Thank you," said Della in her sweet girlish voice, her cheeks flushing a little deeper than usual, and her hands betraying a degree of nervousness, quite new to her, as she toyed with her dainty handkerchief.

Mistaking her manner as a token of the feeling held in court for him, the courteous one blushed a lovely shade of pink, while securing another chair, and seating himself by her side. Ever since his dark eyes rested on her face, so innocent, so fresh, so radiant, he thought her the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"The young people are discussing the question of further amusement, Della," said Raye Fraser, looking at her with a tenderness befitting a father. "Can you not lend your ready assistance?"

But before Della could frame an answer, the lunch bell sounded.

"The question can be decided at the table," suggested the master, as he rose from his chair, and led the way to the dining-room.

Lawn tennis and other games were mentioned for the afternoon pastime, but that of horse back riding seemed in the ascendant, and they finally decided on an animated gallop.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, Della was mounted upon Black Dick, a dark red riding habit encasing her rounded form, while Florence, having selected a riding robe of dark blue, sat upon a milk-white mare, her plumed hat placed jauntily on her auburn hair. Charles had chosen Katie, and Herman was satisfied with Fanny—two gallant steeds.

They stood at the arched gate ready for command, quivering with impatience, yet prancing in one spot under the control of the steady hands that held the reins.

The horse upon which Florence sat, shied at her carresses, and seemed to spurn the touch of her hand.

In a short time they were off in a wild race.

Katie and Fannie were fast gaining distance, as they galloped along a quarter of a mile ahead. They had already cleared the ditch near a bend in the road, and it seemed for a time that nothing could check their head-long speed.

Black Dick and the milk-white mare had almost reached the ditch when Florence noticed how charmingly beautiful Della looked with her red cheeks, and lovely eyes shining like stars in the merry excitement.

Growing passionately jealous at the thought of the friendship existing between Charles and that "proud little ward," as she termed Della, she could not control the angry impulse rising in her heart; and tightening one hand about the reins, and grasping her riding-whip firmly with the other, it suddenly descended sharply on Black Dick's flanks.

The startled animal plunged and reared so violently at the unusual touch of the lash, that he threw his mistress prostrate in the ditch, and dashed madly after the flying steeds.

VI.

THE PRETTY NURSE.

Della uttered a shriek of pain as she fell to the ground in a dead faint.

The next moment there was a sound of galloping hoofs and a young man sprang from his saddle, and bent over Della's prostrate form.

"The little Queen of Clarindene as I live," he exclaimed. "Her horse has thrown her. Poor girl!" and hurrying toward a small stream nearby, he filled his hat with water, and returning sprinkled the white face.

A low moan issued from Della's lips, and a startled look sprang into her eyes as she met the compassionate gaze of a strange young man bending over her.

"Your horse has thrown you," he kindly explained.

"Allow me to assist you to our home, which fortunately is only a few yards from here. You will be quite safe under the hospitality of my sister."

He offered his arm to aid her to rise, but she fell back with a groan.

"Ah, permit me," he said, tenderly, stooping down, and gathering the light form in his strong arms.

He then bore her off, his horse following, to a neat cottage, glimmering among the trees, and standing a short distance from the main road.

A pretty blonde girl came out to meet them, uttering expressions of pity and deep sympathy for the little unfortunate beauty.

While the brother hurried off for a physician, the sister began bathing Della's pale face, and smoothing her disordered hair, making her as comfortable as possible.

The injured one expressed her gratitude thru the faint smile that spread her wan features, as her eyes met the tender gaze of those belonging to the sweet face bending over her.

The physician was not long in gaining the cottage, and pronounced both feet sprained, and one ankle bone out of place. After adjusting it, and leaving directions for her care with the sister, he took his departure, ordering her not to move for a few days. He undertook to stop on his way, and apprise Raye Fraser of the accident.

"I have often seen you at Clarindene, and wished to make your acquaintance," said the gentle nurse, who was almost the age of Della, being something over eighteen.

"Thank you," said Della, "but I do not remember ever seeing you."

"My name is Rosalind Garner," answering Della's look of calm inquiry.

Rosalind was tastefully attired in pale pink, which was most becoming to her fair face.

The room in which Della lay was daintily upholstered in navy blue and gray which seemed to be the prevailing color thru out the cottage.

The brother and sister lived alone in this cottage with its beautiful lawns and gardens.

Evening came and brought the household from Clarindene to see Della and express their sad regrets over her misfortune.

Florence, bending over, said to her in a low voice: "I am sorry I struck Dick. I did not think he would throw you. I hope you won't tell any one about it."

"Certainly not," was the low response, with a nervous turn of her head.

It was some time before Della was able to return home.

Raye Fraser and his nephew had visited her a number of times, and expressed appreciation of the kind attention given Della, and warmly invited the inmates of the cottage to visit frequently at Clarindene.

VII.

THE VISITORS SUMMONED HOME.

The guests had not taken their leave when Rosalind and her brother made their first appearance at the beautiful mansion after Della had returned.

For the afternoon's pastime, lawn tennis was chosen, and during it's progress the color rose in Rosalind's cheeks, and her eyes drooped shyly whenever she encountered the ardent gaze of Herman Hayden.

Life and the world were changed to her the first moment she beheld him.

"Della," said Herman to himself, as his dark eyes roved from one to the other, "is child-like in simplicity, and beautiful as a dream, but Rosalind is the star of my existence." And he resolved to learn his fate before leaving for home.

Harry Garner's admiration was centered upon Della. He could not forget he had carried her in his arms and her beautiful head had rested confidently on his shoulder.

Two weeks later the guests were leaving Clarindene after a delightful stay of six weeks or more. Mrs. Hayden was becoming lonesome without her children and had summoned them home.

In the meantime Herman had learned his fate at the Cottage. Each day from the first he sought the shy glances and pink blushes of fair Rosalind. The day on which he was to leave Clarindene accompanied by his sister, he heard her declaration of

love in response to his own, and won from her a promise to wed him before the beginning of another year.

When the time had come for the visitor's departure, Charles shook the hand of his friend and college room-mate long and warmly, and expressed his deep regret at parting with his genial presence.

He then bade Florence, "goodbye" smilingly, clasping her hand a moment only in his own.

This farewell did not escape Della's quick notice, as her jealous, aching heart was depicted in every lineament of her face.

Florence then turned to Della.

She said, "goodbye," lightly, and almost haughtily, as she whispered low:

"You have not failed to see I am taking home with me Charles Fraser's heart. We had many a pleasant walk while you lay at the romantic cottage."

Fortunately amidst the hurry of departure, no one saw Della's white, agitated face, and her form sway a little as she grasped the pillar belonging to the front veranda.

When the carriage drove off, she suddenly turned, and sought her quiet room to indulge in a heart-breaking cry.

VIII.

DELLA'S LONELY HEART.

It had become Raye Fraser's intention to send Charles away for a few days to settle a matter of business that had been delayed too long already.

On the morning of his departure, he met Della at the arched gate, looking somewhat sad, and paler than usual.

He had decided to walk to the station as the air was cool and refreshing, and the distance not far.

"Be a good girl, Della," he smiled, taking her warm hand in his, "'till I come back, and don't let any one carry you off, for what would we do with no sunbeam in the house and no joyous sound ringing in the spacious halls."

Making an effort to swallow the lump rising in her throat, Della essayed to laugh aloud, but only succeeded in forcing a smile that lacked the old roguish curve.

The manly figure was fast disappearing in the shadow of the great oak trees.

Gazing down the road thru a mist of tears that nearly blinded him from view, "Oh, Charles, Charles," she cried, "don't think me merely a girl,—I have a woman's heart."

And she buried her face in her hands.

Della entered the library a few minutes later looking so sad and wistful, that Raye Fraser kindly inquired the reason.

She seated herself on a low ottoman at his feet. With her hands clasped about her knees, and looking up into his face, "I should like to ask you something, sir," she said.

"Do you know anything of my parents, anything of my birth? I must have a mother somewhere in this sad world who would love her lonely child. Oh, sir, if you know anything of them, will you not tell me?"

"What ails you today, Della?" gently stroking her golden hair. "Why trouble yourself with such questions?" he gravely asked. "Are you not cared for, protected, happy? Do you wish to leave me?"

"No, no, sir; but the woman who brought me here when a child,—who was she?"

Raye Fraser looked down into the wistful face of the beautiful girl he loved as his own.

"Della," he said, thoughtfully, "I believe she was your mother, but I can not tell. She told me nothing,—only your name. You resemble her now very closely, and as I said before, I firmly believe she was your mother. For some reason she requested me to call her by her maiden name."

The poor girl bowed her head on her knee, and gave way to her tumultuous thoughts.

Her mother! That then was the sweet mysterious tie that bound her to the strange woman.

Like a flash of light she recalled the memory of her first meeting with her—the sad dark eyes, the earnest questions, and the fond caresses.

Then the journey to Clarindene, and the sorrowful parting. And Della's yearning heart went out in a tide of affectionate grief toward the mother she might never see again.

"Let us be patient, Della," he said, kindly, "and hope that your mother will some day return."

"But do not worry over it," he entreated, "and dim the lovely roses Charles admires so very much. I have ordered some pretty new dresses for you, too. There, cheer up, darling, and get ready for a drive."

"Indeed, sir," said Della, softly, "I do not know how to thank you for all you have done for me."

"You have more than paid me, my 'Little Sunbeam.' You have beguiled many of my weary hours with your sunny presence, and tho fast merging into womanhood, I shall ever regard you as a loving and faithful daughter."

Della then went out to order the carriage, holding the precious thought that at least in the heart of Raye Fraser there beamed for her a constant and true affection.

"How do you like the young man of the cottage, Della?" asked her guardian while driving toward the city.

The question somewhat surprised Della, and gave her a reverie of thought.

"He has been very kind to me," was the simple reply.

"The young man called today and asked permission to pay his attentions to you. What do you say to this 'Little Sunbeam,'?" casting upon her a look of amused interest.

She grew a trifle pale, and her heart sank within her—wondering the while—were it his desire that she should turn her thoughts toward him.

"I do not wish him to come as a lover," declared Della, candidly, "but whenever he calls I shall treat him with due courtesy."

IX.

THE SUITOR'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

Some days later Della was idly running her fingers over the keys of her Baby Grand piano when she heard a familiar voice thru the open window, the only voice that had the power to set her heart aglow.

Charles had returned and was speaking to his uncle on the broad gravel path.

He soon entered where inspiring music filled the room.

"Ah, here you are, Della," Charles exclaimed, coming toward her, and placing his arms about her, "just as he would have done were she his own sister," thought Della.

She felt tempted to throw her arms around his neck, and tell him how she had missed him, but recalling Florence's parting words, restrained herself, and merely asked, "did he have a pleasant and profitable journey?"

He led her to the sofa, and told her everything of interest that happened during his absence.

As he sought her hand and caressed it as was his wont, he noted for the first time her restrained manner.

The old child-like freedom was gone, while he talked to her, and afterwards she seemed to avoid him rather than seek him as in the days of her childhood.

Sometime later he saw her walking over the enchanting grounds with Harry Garner, and could not rid himself of the slight pain gradually deepening, when following them with his eyes, until they were lost in the distance.

He remembered her constant companionship during childhood, and her frank, radiant manner of only a short time ago. How she had changed toward him!

"Did she love Harry Garner?" he often asked himself. Yet he perceived no joyous light in her beautiful eyes.

They seemed tinged with a shade of sadness; and there was nothing in her mien when in Harry's presence that surprised the true state of her heart, as being stirred by the passion of love.

Della accepted Harry Garner's attention with such retiring courtesy, that he almost despaired of ever winning her.

When ever on the point of disclosing his heart, something in her manner forbade the ardent flow that was ready to escape his lips.

It was not long, however, before he found courage to declare his love and ask her to be his wife.

He felt assured that she cared for no other neighboring gentleman, and entertained a faint hope that some day, she would love him.

"I can give you my hand in friendship," she answered, "but never my heart in love."

"You do not love any one else, do you, Della?" he calmly questioned.

The half frightened look that spread her features, and the conscious blushes coming and going surprised him.

"You need not answer, Della, unless you choose," he kindly said.

"I prefer not," she softly replied.

Shortly afterwards the interview closed.

"Is it possible she loves Charles Fraser, the heir of Clarindene," Harry uttered half aloud on his way to the cottage. "If this be true, he surely does not suspect it."

A hearty laugh greeted him as he entered the gate.

"What's the matter, Harry?" said Rosalind, who was standing on the porch, watching him with roguish eyes. "You look like you had lost all your fortune."

"I have," said he with a ring of despair that smote his sister's heart.

"Ah," she said to herself, as her brother passed in, "I believe he has come from Clarindene, and has been teasing Della again with his attentions, and she has given him little or no encouragement. Poor Harry! Della is so sweet and beautiful, I am not surprised that she has stolen his heart."

"Did you not admire Florence Hayden?" asked Rosalind, while they were having an early dinner, "I think her a very pretty girl."

"Miss Hayden is unquestionably a pretty girl, but there is something unexplainable about her that I do not like. Yet, Rosalind, since she is to be my sister-in-law, I shall treat her with the most profound courtesy."

"Should you never care to wed, Harry, you must live with Herman and I."

"You are very kind and considerate, sister,—we will talk more of this hereafter. I shall never marry since the girl I love has not only refused me, but given me clear evidence that she loves another. Does Herman wish an early date?"

"Yes," she answered somewhat shyly, and I have been thinking of celebrating the wedding Christmas day."

"A very good time," observed Harry, "and only a few months ahead."

"You must not neglect to send word to Mrs. Anthony, the wealthy widow," he added.

"I shall not forget. Mrs. Anthony is one of my dearest friends."

Before the day ended, Rosalind penned a long letter to Herman containing her promise to wed him on Christmas day.

X.

WHEN I HAVE FOUND MY MOTHER.

It was an ideal day. The sole occupant of the garden at Clarindene was Della, looking beautiful and picturesque in her attitude. Her golden hair was loosened, and fell in shining ringlets far below her belt. The flowing sleeve of pale blue had fallen back from the perfect white arm uplifted to pluck the purple lilacs. She was striving to reach them, when a voice thrilled her.

"Allow me," said Charles Fraser, smiling, and approaching with rapid strides.

A fairer vision of Della he thought he had never seen.

"You are very kind," she said, as he handed her the desired bunch with a graceful obeisance.

"I feared I was not going to accomplish my efforts, tho standing upon tip-toe," she said, coiling her hair on the nape of her neck, and gazing about in such a manner that betokened to Charles a disposition to run away from him.

"Della," said he, reproachfully, "why is my presence never so welcome as in the days of yore—the days of your happy childhood?"

A puzzled look sprang into her eyes, her hands trembled, letting down again the rings of hair.

As he caught her hand, she tried to pull away from him, blushing a lovely crimson.

"Della," he whispered softly, "what is it?" "You have passed from childhood to womanhood,—can you not love me with a woman's heart?"

"Stop!" she urged, striving again to loosen his grasp.

But he held her firmly.

"Della," he pursued in earnest, leading her to a seat, "do not mistake me. I have loved you ever since you came to Clarindene, a beautiful child."

"And now that you have blossomed into a beautiful woman, the depth of my love can not be reckoned."

"Speak to me Della," he entreated, as he lifted her bowed head.

"Florence!" she gasped. "I thought it was she you loved."

A sudden light broke over his handsome features.

"I never loved Florence Hayden," he returned. "What put such a notion into your head?"

"She gave me the impression and I began to believe it."

"We will say no more about her," he said with renewed courage, "as I am now deeply interested in the lovely girl beside me. Tell me, Della, is it really true that you love me?"

She threw her arms about his neck as in childish glee, and her head fell on his breast in the consciousness of her joy.

Lifting once more her beautiful face, and drawing her still closer to his joyous bosom, he kissed her red lips, again and again.

"You will be my wife some day, Della—you will be the mistress of Clarindene."

At the utterance of those words, Della calmly freed herself from his embrace, and rose to her feet.

Looking steadily in his face, she somewhat sadly said:

"How can you ask me to be your wife, when you have no knowledge of my parents?"

"That is not a question of my heart, Della. The truth is, I love you."

"But I can not wed you," said Della, "until I have found my mother. I often dream that I have found her, and something tells me my dreams will some day be realized."

"But Della," said Charles, almost despairingly, "it may be a long time before this happens, and perhaps forever."

"Oh, no. It can not be long. My yearning love will reach her ere long. I know that God will soon answer my prayer and direct me to her."

"Then I may claim you as my own?" rising to his feet.

"I will promise to wed you, when I have found my mother," she pledged with a smile.

He once more drew her to himself and kissed her with fervent affection.

Then they walked over the green lawn and entered the house. Hand in hand the lovers passed to the library where Raye Fraser sat in his accustomed place.

He looked up with a pleasing smile when he saw them enter.

"Uncle," said Charles, his face beaming with joy, "this little sunbeam is my promised wife."

This announcement was rather surprising to Raye Fraser, yet it delighted him beyond expression.

"This has always been my heart's desire," he said, rising, as tho to evoke his blessing, "and should I live to see you happily married, my greatest wish is granted."

XI

CHRISTMAS NIGHT AT THE COTTAGE.

There had been no fresh fall of snow on Christmas day. The air was keen with its frosty breath. The roads were white and hard.

The evening came with that mystical hush that always falls on Christmas night. The stars were glittering their best, the white cottage was brilliantly lighted, and fragrant flowers were breathing everywhere.

The little parlor was crowded with bright faces and merry voices.

The marriage ceremony had been performed that united fair Rosalind to handsome Herman Hayden.

How lovely she looked in her robe of white silk and flowers.

At her side stood beautiful Della. Her costume of pale pink with charming roses lent a new aspect to her radiant face and figure.

At some little distance stood Florence Hayden, a shade of light gray adorning her gracefully.

Her countenance bore a cheerful aspect until her eyes rested on the fair form of Della. Then her face depicted something of defeat, and from her blue orbs there radiated a flash of scorn. Charles Fraser offered her only courteous attention, but he gave to Della sincere devotion.

Among the limited number of guests was the charming, dashing, and wealthy widow, Mrs. Anthony of Glen Heights.

She had often heard of beautiful Della of Clarindene, but never had the pleasure of meeting her till tonight.

Della's brilliant personality captivated her soul, and won from her at once an invitation to visit Glen Heights as soon as arrangements could be made. Her many visitors would be glad to welcome her.

"Thank you," said Della, in her usual sweetness, "I shall be delighted to visit your home and meet your charming friends."

So it was decided and sanctioned by Raye Fraser that Della should visit the wealthy widow at no distant date.

XII.

DELLA AT GLEN HEIGHTS.

Christmas had gone, and with it the white snow that covered the earth for thousands of miles, and the great bare branches raised their giant arms to the wintry skies.

'Twas in the month of January. The cottage by the road had been deserted for weeks past, and the occupants of the mansion were busy making preparations for Della's journey to Glen Heights.

This charming place was built upon a high eminence that overlooked the beautiful river below, and commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country.

There Della was graciously received. Mrs. Anthony spared no pains in making her guests happy and comfortable. She introduced Della as "Queen of Clarindene," as Rosalind called her, and from the moment of her arrival she seemed to pay special attention to her.

The weather was very cold, but not too cold for Della to enjoy her morning walks. The other guests preferred to sit around the register awhile and discuss their plans for the day.

One morning Della wandered down the woodland path, that led to a humble dwelling. She had walked farther than usual that day, and became so cold that she decided to seek permission to enter and warm herself before returning.

An aged woman responded to her summons, and admitted her into the cosy room where a bright fire was blazing.

"Is some one sick?" asked Della, quietly, after warming herself a few moments. "I thought I heard a faint coughing in the adjoining room."

"Yes," answered the woman. "The lady has been quite ill, but is now much better."

"May I see her?" said Della, her sympathetic heart reaching out to her. "I may be able to cheer her. I am visiting Mrs. Anthony of Glen Heights, and I often take these morning walks."

"Go right in Miss," said the woman without hesitation, and resuming her knitting.

"How do you do, my young lady", said the sick one, as Della entered timidly. "I heard your pleasant voice, and wished you would come in to see me." "What is your name?" she asked, as Della came to her side.

For a brief moment Della forgot to answer. She was scanning the woman's features that bore a familiar look and trying to imagine where she had once heard that soft, sweet voice.

"Della Dare", she replied, seating herself on the edge of the bed.

The woman's face turned as white as death, and her feeble breath seemed to have left her body.

Della sprang up in alarm, and was about to hasten from the room to summon the nurse, when the woman grasped her hand.

"Stay!" she entreated. "I am much better. Do not leave me".

"Della!" she gasped, with outstretched arms, unable to restrain herself longer, "you are my child".

"Mother!" escaped Della's lips, kissing her hands and face.

"Oh, Mother," she sobbed on her bosom, "why did you leave me there? Why did you not take me with you"?

"You have been happy, have you not, Della? Raye Fraser has been kind to you, has he not?"

"Yes," was the reply, but I have always yearned for you. Why am I there, mother, and where is my father?"

"Oh, my darling, you nearly break my heart when you speak of your father. Calm yourself, Della, and I will try to explain.

"When you were a baby of scarcely ten months, I left you one summer evening with your nurse, while I answered a call from a dear friend in distress. She bade me come at once, and tell no one of my visit. I expected to be back at least in a couple of hours, but a sudden storm arose that threatened never to abate, rendering the roads impassable on account of the great floods of water that crossed them in many places. Nothing would do but that I remain over night.

In the morning the water was lowered, and I succeeded in returning home with wet feet.

Your father met me at the door, and with a face aflame with rage, and a wave of his hand I shall never forget, told me he

had heard the disgraceful news and bade me begone, and never again show my false form.

I tried to speak, but he slammed the door in my face.

With throbbing brain, and breaking heart, I staggered out of the yard over the wet grass, back to my faithful friend.

Afterwards I learned that some jealous, wicked woman circulated the report that the physician whom I led to Cora was my discarded lover.

I wrote to Alvin, your father, telling him of my innocence, but he never answered me.

Some years since I heard you were placed in the care of your father's sister, who was never kind to you, and he had left for foreign lands.

And after your father's judgment of me, as an unworthy mother, I could not have you with me. I knew you would be well educated at Clarindene, and have every comfort and luxury of life.

So I took you to Raye Fraser.

He owed me a debt of gratitude, and I claimed it in his future care of you."

"What was this debt of gratitude, mother"? Della interrupted.

"I will tell you", said Mrs. Dare.

"A year or more before I took you to Clarindene, I over heard the villianous plans of a band of robbers, who were bent on taking Raye Fraser's life, and robbing his beautiful house of it's many treasures.

I informed him of this, tho I had to walk the distance of four miles.

That night the house was guarded, the robbers caught, and fitly punished."

"How have you supported yourself all these years?" Della asked.

"Shortly after our separation, my widowed mother died leaving me a small life- annuity."

At this moment the nurse entered to ask if her services were needed.

"No", was the kind answer.

"What time is it?" asked Mrs. Dare.

"It is almost ten o'clock," observed the nurse quitting the room.

"So late," said Della, rising with anxious dread.

"I fear Mrs. Anthony will be much worried. I never yet stayed away longer than eight."

"You will come to tomorrow, Della?" gently pleaded the mother.

"I will if I can", was the kind response. "Tomorrow night, Mrs. Anthony gives a house party in my honor. But I have not the heart to be joyous, mother".

"Try to enjoy yourself, Della," said Mrs. Dare, kissing her, while her dark eyes were filling with tears. And if you can not come tomorrow—then the next day."

Bidding her mother an affectionate "goodby" till the next meeting, Della left the humble dwelling and returned to Glen Heights with a lighter and happier heart since she had found her mother.

XIII.

MRS. ANTHONY'S HOUSE PARTY.

The morning dawned clear and cold; and over the earth lay a carpet of heavy snow. The great branches and hedges bowed their heads under the weight of their heavy garments.

Evening came, and over the beautiful landscape, the moon was shining brightly.

The imposing mansion stood out clear under the starry sky and the light of the silver moon.

When the great hall door opened to admit one or more of the numerous invited guests, there came forth a ruddy glow that was cheerful and pleasant to see.

On this occasion, as on every other, Mrs. Anthony was a charming hostess.

The long spacious room was ablaze with light and fragrant with flowers. The hum of conversation rose from the brilliant groups, standing here and there, listening to the strains of music with which the orchestra beguiled the hour.

"There comes la belle Della", said a clear voice, and every one turned to gaze.

Standing under the light of the great chandelier, robed in red satin, a necklace of rare pearls adorning her white neck, she looked the queen of beauty and grace in contrast to those around her.

Mrs. Anthony's numerous friends were delighted to meet Della and breathe in the beauty of her fair face and genial soul.

Dr. Lawrence was quite smitten with the little "Queen," but was not selfish with her company. He wished to present her to his friend who had just returned from Paris.

"He bears the same name, Miss Dare," "but of course can be of no relation."

A cold shudder ran thru Della's frame at the utterance of these last words.

While the Doctor was giving the introduction with due politeness, Mr. Dare turned pale and staggered back a step, as he heard the name and observed the resemblance to his wife long since discarded.

How her heart beat, as she noted his movement.

She scarcely lifted her eyes while acknowledging an introduction to Mr. Dare. She felt his burning gaze on her face, and glancing up, encountered a fixed look of surprise, inquiry, and emotion.

Hardly able to conceal her own agitation, she held out her hand in feigned welcome.

Dr. Lawrence remembered his engagement with Miss Lanore thru the Conservatory, and left Della for a while in charge of Mr. Dare.

She felt intuitively this man was her father, and began to dislike him at once for treating her mother so shamefully.

"Our names being the same, Miss Dare, we ought to be friends," he said, endeavoring to control himself.

Della forced a laugh, and said, "the future would determine what kind of friends they were to be".

"Miss Dare," gathering fresh courage, "I wish to speak to you away from the listening crowd. Will you come with me?"

Della followed him more to reproach him than to please him.

When they reached a secluded place, Della continued to steel her heart against this man, as the vision of a lonely mother passed before her.

"Della," he began at once, "has it occurred to you, I might be your father?"

"You call yourself my father!" she said, confronting him with open scorn.

"I am your father, Della, do not scorn me".

"Where is my mother?" she asked in bitter reproach.

"I know nothing of her", was the somewhat sad reply.

"Ask me nothing of her, my daughter. Is it not hard for a father to admit to his child her mother is unworthy of her love?"

"Stop!" she commanded sternly with a grand sweep of her hand. "Say no more against the name of my innocent mother! I have met her, and know her, and she has told me all. She was innocent of the evil report against her. Did you not receive her letter, relating the true cause of her absence?"

"I received no letter", answered the father, huskily. Then Della told him of meeting her mother at the humble dwelling.

Mr. Dare covered his face with his hands and wept bitterly.

Della pitied him now.

"You will go to her tomorrow?" pleaded Della, winding her arm about him, and kissing his bearded cheek. "You will meet me at nine tomorrow at the cross roads? How happy she will be to see you."

"Do you think she can forgive me, Della?"

"Yes", said Della, for she still loves you."

"Poor Mabel! How she must have suffered all these years," he uttered aloud.

"And now, Della, dear," he continued, taking her hand in his, "tell me where you are living, and why you are there?"

"After leaving you in care of my sister", he went on without waiting for her reply, "I traveled abroad. Several years afterwards I repented having neglected my child so long, and decided to return and do my duty as a father; but on reaching the village I learned you had disappeared.

My sister and I could find no trace of you, and I at least mourned you as stolen or dead."

Della related the story of the strange woman who took her to a wealthy home, called Clarindene, not many miles from Glen Heights. "I was not happy with Aunt Matilda, so I followed the woman who held a fascination over me. I have recently discovered she was my mother. I should like you to meet Raye Fraser, father, whose ward I have been ever since".

"And thank him for his care of you," he gratefully interposed.

"We had better return to the guests now, Della", said her father at length, rising—they will miss you. I shall deliver you

to Mrs. Anthony, who does not suspect our relationship, and tomorrow I shall await your coming at the cross-roads”.

Della heard the music, the murmur of voices, as tho in the distance. She was ever thinking of her father and mother, and trying to picture their strange and happy reunion.

XIV.

REUNION OF SEVERED HEARTS.

The next morning Della woke earlier than usual. She had slept but a few hours.

Consulting her jeweled watch, she arose, and looking out of the window was pleased to note that the roads were considerably broken.

She experienced some little difficulty in getting off this morning, as some of the guests of last night decided to remain at Glen Heights for a few days longer at Mrs. Anthony's earnest request.

By telling them she wished to take the sick woman at the humble dwelling some of the flowers while fresh, she was granted a short leave of absence.

Her face brightened when she caught a glimpse of her father's form patiently waiting her.

When they reached the dwelling, she bade him remain outside a short time, until she could break the joyful news to her yet feeble mother.

Having gained her bedside, Della kissed her sweetly and placed in her hands the richly colored flowers.

“These are beautiful roses, Della,” said Mrs. Dare inhaling their sweet perfume. “I hope you had a pleasant evening?”

“As pleasant as could be expected, mother. And whom do you think I met there? Some one who still loves you, and now believes in your innocence. He never heard from you, mother, after you left him.”

“Della!” she breathed. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, mother, that I met my dear father.”

Mrs. Dare for a moment lost all power of speech.

“You say he believes me innocent,” she said, recovering herself.

"Yes, mother, he told me this last evening. He never received your letter, and I told him of our meeting."

"Then why does he not come to me?" she asked brokenly.

"He is here mother."

Della informed her mother that her father was waiting outside to be summoned in. She wished to apprise her of the gladness before meeting her husband again, after having been separated so long.

A few moments later Della went out for her father, and together they entered the room where his dear wife lay.

"Mabel!" he cried, advancing and extending his arms, the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Alvin!" she responded, her eyes filling with tears and her heart bursting with joy.

He bent and kissed her face over and over again.

"Can you forgive me, Mabel, dear? I have spoiled your life—I have done you cruel wrong. Can you forget all, and love me as you did years ago?"

"Yes," she sweetly said, lifting his hand to her lips.

"For this neglect, Mabel," he said with tender caress, "I shall devote to you and Della the remaining years of my life. My prayer is for your speedy recovery and my wishes are for your comfort and happiness. Our beautiful daughter will nurse you back to health, and never again will our loving hearts be sundered."

Toward noon Della returned to Glen Heights, and told Mrs. Anthony the story of her father and mother, and that they were reconciled at last.

Then she revealed her intention of staying with her mother until she was able to travel with her father, before returning to Clarindene, and acquainting the household of the glad tidings.

In less than a week, Mrs. Dare was able to be up and take a short walk with Della in the fresh open air; and not long afterwards was ready and strong enough to leave with her beloved husband.

Mr. Dare still possessed considerable wealth, and delighted his wife by purchasing an elegant residence in the City of Hartford.

XV.

DELLA'S RETURN TO CLARINDENE.

The inmates of the beautiful home at Clarindene were made joyous by the return of Della who held such powerful sway over their hearts.

Her fiance, Charles Fraser, stood at the iron gate, impatiently waiting the approach of the carriage.

Assisting her to alight, he kissed her rosy cheek. Walking up the broad gravel path that led to the front veranda, he turned to her and said:

"How I have missed you, darling, and how glad I am to have you with me again."

Glancing up at one of the large windows Della saw the beaming face of Raye Fraser.

How changed it was since she first came to him.

It bore the time-worn marks of seventy years, and his hair was as white as it could ever be.

By the time Della and Charles reached the great hall, he was there ready to welcome her with fatherly affection.

She had not been home an hour before she told those dear to her how she had found her father and mother, while away, relating the cause of their separation and picturing the scene of their glad reunion.

"Then the woman who brought you here was really your mother," said Raye Fraser, his mind wandering back to the day when Della came to him a beautiful child.

"Yes", returned Della, her face all aglow, "she was my mother".

"I am glad to hear this intelligence," acknowledged Raye Fraser, "but it takes away from me my 'Little Sunbeam,' he said mournfully, with something like tears filling his dim eyes.

"I shall always be your 'Little Sunbeam'," was her consoling reply. "I going to my father and mother for a time need not separate us entirely."

"You will be graciously received whenever you choose to visit us. Besides they have promised to come in a few days and thank you for your great kindness to their child."

With these cheering words, Raye Fraser looked up and smiled.

Half an hour later Della and Charles were alone in the sitting room.

"Della, darling," he began, toying with the beautiful diamond that sparkled on her dainty hand, "how rejoiced am I to learn you have found your parents. You remember your promise in the garden? 'When I have found my mother'"—repeating her words.

She interrupted him by placing her finger over his lips.

"It would be unfair to deprive my parents of my company so soon, Charles dear," she said, with a coy glance into his eyes that healed the wound she was inflicting. "Besides I have promised to go with them this summer to visit Aunt Matilda. I will devote this summer to them, and after that, if I live, perhaps—"

"I will claim my bride," he interrupted, kissing her red lips.

The day that brought Mr. and Mrs. Dare to Clarindene was one never to be forgotten.

The meeting with Raye Fraser, the kind guardian of Della all these years was sweet and pathetic.

When the mother clasped his aged hand in hers after a lapse of nine years, and looked in his kindly face, her dark eyes flooded with tears and her happy heart swelled with the most profound gratitude.

When they took their departure, after a most delightful visit, Della's sunny presence went with them.

Raye Fraser and his nephew were loath to part with her even for a short time, but she cheered them with endearing words, and promised to return as a "Sunbeam" as often as her parents would permit her to do so.

XVI.

A VISIT TO AUNT MATILDA.

Della loved her beautiful Hartford home, because her father and mother dwelt there in harmony and love; and being near Rosalind filled her heart with gladness.

Many a happy day was spent in her friend's neat and cosy home.

The humble cottage near Clarindene has been sold to strangers, and Harry Garner was complying with his dear sister's wish.

He was always glad to see Della, and express his best wishes for her future welfare.

His manly Christian character helped him to be reconciled to his fate.

The bright spring days warmed into summer, and Della was making preparations to go with her parents back to the small village from whence she fled over nine years ago.

Shortly after Della's parents began life anew, Alvin Dare wrote his sister Matilda the story of Della and her mother, adding that Mabel was innocent of any wrong.

The lovely girl smiled at her mental picture of Aunt Matilda's possible indignation at the escaped culprit thus tardily brought back to justice; but her smile faded into a demure expression of gravity, as she caught sight of her in her accustomed seat in the door-way. They were giving Aunt Matilda an unexpected surprise.

She was the same woman in spite of her advanced years, carrying the same manner, but showing a decided change in her hair and face. The cold hard lines about the mouth were still the same that her niece remembered so well.

The click of the gate aroused her from her reverie.

Recognizing her brother at once, she threw up her arms in exclamation of delight.

Alvin Dare kissed his sister in fond greeting, and then said to her:

"These are my precious jewels," pointing to wife and daughter.

Miss Matilda took her sister-in-law's hand rather stifly, and expressed the pleasure of seeing Della again in not a very warm fashion. She still resented her sudden disappearance, and stepping a little to one side, ushered the new comers into the house.

It was plain to see that Aunt Matilda was not deeply interested in her brother's exalted praise of Della and her mother, as she went about preparing the wholesome country meal. The table was soon spread with a dozen delicacies, besides the white home-made bread and sweet golden butter.

Della in particular partook of the fresh repast with a relish her aunt could not understand.

Toward evening Della began to show signs of weariness from her long journey, and soon afterwards was enjoying a sweet rest in the same room she had occupied when a child.

The next morning she accompanied her parents on an early stroll.

As they walked along side of the small running brook, Mabel pointed out to her husband the place under the tall sycamore, where she sat and talked with Della when but a blooming child. Time had wrought many changes in the lives of these three, but there was little or no change in the village and vicinity.

A wave of sadness pervaded Della's heart, when she heard that dear old Guido had been sold, and she could mount him no more and gallop down the long dusty lane.

In a couple of weeks the summer visit ended and the guests were glad to return to their beautiful Hartford home.

The trees were radiant with the fall colors, and October had come with delightful days.

Toward the close of the month, Charles Fraser claimed Della as his fair bride.

The wedding was solemnized at Clarindene, and Raye Fraser would have it no other than a brilliant affair.

Among the numerous guests were Mr. and Mrs. Herman Hayden, his sister Florence, Dr. Glen Lawrence and wife, formerly Mrs. Anthony, and Harry Garner.

Many wished the happy pair a life of sunshine with just enough shadow to remind them of the sorrows of others.

Florence greeted them with a new light in her face and a softer tone in her voice.

Turning to one side, she said to Della:

"I wish you all joy, Della, and I trust we will ever be friends. I have found an ideal love, and expect to be a happy bride on New Years day".

Della smiled, and wished her success and joy in her new anticipations.

It had been decided before Della's marriage that her future home should be Clarindene.

Raye Fraser felt he had but few remaining years on this beautiful earth, and his greatest desire was to live them with his adopted nephew, and little "Sunbeam".

BELVIDORE

I.

When Robert Earle left England a year or two before, he had no intention of going to America.

Sunny Italy charmed him for a month, France for a longer time, then he sought the charm of America.

At length he found himself in the village of Mt. Auburn. It's beautiful lanes, artistic windings, and over hanging branches of trees were enough to charm any one; but the day on which he met Madelaine Carson, and saved her life, he knew that something had led him on to his fate.

She was very fond of going down to the strand, and climbing to the top of an out-looking rock; and on this eventful day, heedless of the gathering storm, she sauntered off in her morning dress of blue, swinging her large hat in her hand, instead of placing it on her head of chestnut brown hair, and tying the blue strings under her dimpled chin.

Meanwhile the tempest gathered, and the day darkened; a wild summer storm was coming on that had been brewing for weeks. The sun was lost to sight amid masses of threatening clouds with thunder and lightning in their black bosoms.

Madelaine had reached the strand, and gained the summit of the rock.

One of her supreme delights was in watching a storm; and standing there with her brown hair flying loosely from her bare head, she looked out upon the mad sea with glorious dark eyes.

The storm came on. The air grew thick and sulphurous, the lightning flashed out at intervals, and shot across the black sky, the thunder muttered and cracked in the distance; and over all was a dull surging roar—the sound of approaching waters.

Rapt and inspired she gazed on the sublime scene unmindful of the terrible danger that menaced her.

A salt mist beat sharply against her face.

With a startled cry she awoke from her dream, and looking downward clasped her hands in an agony of fear.

"Oh, God!" she cried, lifting her white face to the dark heavens, "the tide is coming in, and I have stayed too late!" "Too late!" echoed in her ears like the sound of a death knell.

The green waves were creeping up the rock, and in a little while they would close over her.

She sank down and covering her face with her hands, tried to pray. She thought of her lonely mother in their cottage, her fretting because of her stay, and her great sorrow because she never came back.

The leaping waves were creeping up, up, up, and unconsciousness began to steal over her.

At this juncture a ringing shout pierced the air, a sudden splashing plunge was heard, then her form was caught up by strong masculine arms and heroically borne thru the mad waters.

"Thank God! we are safe!" exclaimed a deep musical voice, as a place of safety was reached.

Madelaine seemed conscious of nothing but the strong clasp of the arms supporting her and the noble face smiling down upon her, as he placed her on a sure footing.

"Where shall I conduct you, madam?" said Madelaine's deliverer, after the storm had spent its fury, leaving the sky clear and blue.

"To the cottage on the hill".

"So I supposed—I saw you coming down a couple of hours ago and a little later ascend the rock, and when the tide came in so rapidly, I feared you might not have noticed it, so I hurried down and you know I was not a moment too soon.

Do not thank me any more please, you are wet and trembling—let us hurry on."

During the progress of the storm Mrs. Carson was filled with fear and anxiety for her daughter, and was starting seaward, as Madelaine and her companion were approaching the hill.

"Oh, Madelaine, my dear child, you can not imagine how I have suffered—why can not you keep away from that dreadful sea!"

"I should have been carried off with the tide, but for the timely aid of this gentleman", laughed Madelaine; and turning

her bright face upon her deliverer, she said, with a look in her brown eyes more expressive than words:

"I shall never forget the one who has saved me from an awful death."

The stranger smiled and bowed, and was taking his leave, when Mrs. Carson entreated him not to go without her thanks—she wished to know his name that she might remember it with gratitude.

"Robert Earle, at your service." And as he was to remain in the neighborhood a few weeks longer, he would beg permission to call again, and learn how the young lady fared.

Mrs. Carson could not find it in her heart to refuse so courteous a request.

II.

The Earles of Belvidore did not belong to one of the wealthiest families in England; but they had carried themselves haughtily to all alike, rich and poor, and many predicted that some day their pride would have a fall.

Edward Earle and his wife held the greatest pride in their son, the heir of Belvidore. He would marry some well bred heiress, perhaps his cousin Gladys.

He had inherited his father's frank face, clear blue eyes, and dark clustering hair; but unlike his twin sister he had not inherited his mother's pride. He had a tender heart and a loving nature, and was more gifted than the generality of men.

He had been smiled upon by some of the loveliest women in London; but no smile lingered in his memory, but that of the young girl he had saved.

And what a face!—marvelous in young beauty and exquisite coloring, together with a sweet charming expression of innocent delight.

Quite often he directed his steps toward the small cottage, and enjoyed the company of the young girl and her widowed mother who were always courteous and kind, but he longed to meet Madelaine alone again, and tell her of his love.

She had a mind and soul as beautiful as her face.

She loved the fresh morning air, the song of the birds, and all nature's wonders. She was fond of her books and music.

She loved all things beautiful, good, and noble, she loved her kind mother.

Robert had made many friends at Mt. Auburn, but only sought the presence of Madelaine Carson.

One day earlier than usual he sauntered down the path that led to her home in the hope of seeing her breathing the fresh morning air.

He waited and watched, but in vain. Then he took his stand beneath a large oak tree.

His patience was soon rewarded.

He saw her coming down the avenue that led toward the sea, with her hat tied under her chin, and a favorite book under her arm.

Her glossy brown hair was coiled upon the back of her head, making her appear a year older than she did yesterday.

He advanced to meet her, bowing with grave politeness.

"You are fond of poetry," he said in undisguised pleasure, noting that the book was a copy of "Longfellow's Poems."

"Yes. I never tire of reading the story of Evangeline."

"You promised I might accompany you down to the beach sometime, Miss Carson," said the young man sweetly. "Shall I be intruding this morning?"

What else could she do, but give him permission to go with her down to the beach.

They walked on together till they came near the cliff where a long row of trees gave deep shade.

"This is my favorite resort," remarked Madelaine, "I often come here with my books."

They spent a portion of the forenoon reading and talking, but Robert Earle could not tell whether the beautiful girl beside him loved him or not.

With him it was love at first sight.

Sitting there under the power of great personality, he forgot he was heir of Belvidore, forgot his proud mother and sister, and that she was a poor unknown girl, forgot everything, but that he was alone with Madelaine, and that he loved her. He soon found himself declaring his love in an earnest manner.

"Madelaine, do you love me in return?"

"I—I do not know," she faltered. "I have only known you a short time, but I feel very grateful to you for saving my life."

"You must love me Madelaine," he said, with kind eagerness. "I am giving you the first true love of my heart. Will you try?"

"I will try," was the soft echo.

She admired his tall manly figure, and fair English face; his dark hair, clear blue soulful eyes, and gentle manner; and thought very likely in time she could give him a responsive affection.

Conscious of a new hope he lifted her white hand and pressed it to his lips, wining from her a promise to meet him again on the morrow.

They parted at the foot of the hill.

To Madelaine it seemed something of her life had gone with him.

While climbing the hill she said to herself:

"What a grand face! After all I believe I do love him, but could not tell him so. I only gave him an admiring glance of deep gratitude.

III.

An early June morning; a cloud here and there in the sky to mar the perfect blue, but the sun still shone in marked radiance, and the pet bird in Madelaine's home sang his sweetest song.

In his room at the Holland House Robert Earle sat reading. The hand of the clock on the quaint mantle piece pointed to a quarter of nine. He was to meet Madelaine at ten.

A sudden rap on his door broke the solemnity of the hour. He quickly rose to open it.

"A cablegram for Mr. Robert Earle", bowed the obliging clerk, and then withdrew.

The young man lost no time in perusing his important message.

It came from his mother and ran as follows:

"My dear son,—come home at once. We are in great distress, and your father is quite ill."

He read it with a multitude of disturbing thoughts.

What should he do? He wanted to marry Madelaine and take her home to Belvidore. This, however, was out of the question at present.

His family were in sore distress, and his father perhaps at the point of death.

He determined to see her, tho, before he took his leave, and win from her a promise to marry him when he should return.

An hour later he must take the train for New York.

With the cablegram in his hand he hurried out, and looked toward the cottage for a sign of Madelaine.

He walked passed the house and glanced impatiently at the windows.

Suddenly the door opened and Madelaine appeared inviting him in.

"Mamma went to Winnewood this morning," she said, "and I am here alone keeping house. You know I was not to meet you till ten."

Fortune favored him so far he thought in finding her alone.

Accepting the chair so graciously offered him, he said in answer :

"I could not wait till ten to see you, my dear Madelaine, as I must be off for New York by that time."

She looked up in surprise.

"I just received a cablegram from home a few minutes ago," he explained, "telling me my father is quite ill, perhaps dying, and my family are in deep distress. I have not an hour to loose before leaving Mt. Auburn and you," he ended in a tone of regret.

He noted her pale agitated face, and the look of deep sympathy in her eyes.

"I am sorry you are in trouble," she said sadly, "and I shall surely miss you when you are gone."

His face brightened.

"You love me then, Madelaine? Say that you love me, and will marry me when I come back in search of you. It won't be long. May I call you wife, when I return?"

"Your wife?" she repeated, and the very sound of the words seemed to drive the color from her face.

"Yes, dearest, I will take you home to England, you and your mother—to Belvidore, where you will always be gay and happy."

"You are a wealthy man, and I a poor girl. What would your people say—your proud mother? Would they be willing?"

"When they see and know you, Madelaine, they will love you." "Give me your promise, darling," he urged, "and say that you love me. In ten minutes I must leave you."

He took her hand in his, looking earnestly the while into her eyes of unshed tears.

"May I take your sweet promise with me, Madelaine? It will comfort me in my sorrow. You love me, Madelaine."

"I love you," she whispered, and her eyes fell under his piercing glance.

"And you will marry me?"

"Yes," she answered softly, and a look of relief came in the young man's face.

"You will be true, Madelaine?" rising to go.

"Say, 'I will be true, Robert.' You have never called me by that name. Let me hear it now."

When she repeated his name, and promised to be true, his lips touched hers, sealing their love in the fondest affection.

"Goodby, Madelaine, my love, till I see you again—and be true."

These were his last words at parting.

When she raised her beautiful eyes, they were filled with tears—he had left her and was gone.

IV.

When the white cliffs of England rose before him, Robert Earle was nearing his home; but the vision of fair Madelaine kept pace with him tho the wide ocean lay between them.

At the first glimpse of that stately magnificent mansion, his heart stirred within him, for he loved Belvidore with its splendid gardens, its rare and beautiful flowers, the tall ancient trees with all the passion of his youth. It was hard to imagine his father ill, and the dear old home under a cloud.

On arrival his sister Roberta was the first to greet him. Her tear-stained face was free from any smiles, as she kissed him in welcome.

"Oh, Robert, mother has fretted constantly for fear something might happen you before reaching home."

"How is father?" he asked, "and where is mother?"

"Father is no better, and mother is in her boudoir."

Mrs. Earle looked up when her son entered, and held out her arms to him.

"Oh, my son!" she cried, her face wet with tears, "we are in the deepest sorrow. Thank heaven you are here!"

"It may not be so bad as you think, mother," he said, trying to comfort her. "Father may recover."

"This is only a part of our trouble, Robert, and our only hope is in you."

He looked into her gray eyes inquiringly.

"What is it mother? you know I would do anything in the world for you;" and as he spoke, he wiped the tears from her face.

"God bless you, my noble son, for those words, and may my faith in you never grow dim. Let us go now to your father—he calls incessantly for you. We will talk of our other trouble, and its remedy, later on."

They left the elegant boudoir together, went down the long hall, and entered the chamber where the angel of death stood at the threshold.

Mrs. Earle dismissed the nurse, saying, "I will ring when you are required."

The large beautiful room was bathed in evening twilight; and on the white drawn face that lay on the pillows the sun of life was setting.

Edward Earle opened his eyes upon his only son.

"I am glad to see you, Robert. Thank God you are here."

Robert lifted his father's thin hand and pressed it to his lips.

"My dear father," he said, tenderly, "I have come to relieve you of all trouble."

"It is a matter of finance," returned the feeble voice.

"I have loved gold too well. I have failed, Robert, I have failed," he moaned.

"We shall find some way out of the difficulty, father," said his son, hopefully.

"I borrowed a large sum of money," the dying man went on, "to place in those gold and silver mines that were destroyed by water; and now the firm has sent in a notice for the payment of the loan.

They hold a heavy mortgage on Belvidore; and if the money is not paid within six months Belvidore will be sold."

A painful cry escaped Robert Earle's lips.

Belvidore sold!—the grand home of his boyhood!

The very words pierced his young heart.

Edward Earle turned his eyes on his wife.

"Adelaide, you tell our son how he can save Belvidore—the old home we love so well."

Robert Earle looked at the silver moon rising over the trees, and thought of the lovely moonlight walks with sweet Madelaine.

"My own darling," he said to himself, "how I long to be by your side."

His mother touched him on the shoulder, and looked earnestly into his face.

"Robert," she whispered, "for Heaven's sake, do not thwart our plans! You are our only hope."

"What are they mother," he anxiously inquired.

"You recollect, my son, do you not, that years ago we set our hearts on you marrying Gladys some day, your pretty cousin, heiress of great wealth.

She has now developed into beautiful womanhood, and her father has promised to bestow upon her the sum of a hundred thousand pounds on her wedding day.

Just think of it, Robert!"

"You have not seen Gladys for three years, she having been away at school," she continued, "and her face with its perfect features has grown so lovely, and her manner so sweet and charming, you could not resist loving her, Robert, and she has revealed to me in every way but words that she fairly worships you. You can easily win her my son, and Belvidore is restored."

The pleading voice ceased, and profound silence filled the room.

Robert Earle looked again at the gleam of the moonlight, and Madelaine's brilliant face rose again before him.

How he had urged her to be true, and now his proud mother pleads with him to be false.

He tried to tell her of Madelaine, that she was his promised wife, and he must return for her; but his mother's voice arrested the words that came to his lips.

"Robert, my dear son, you will save us?"

The solemn silence was again broken by the father's faint voice.

"My son, you do not answer. Must I die with the dreadful thought that Belvidore is lost forever, your mother and sister's beautiful home?"

Will you contract this marriage to save my honor, and to save Belvidore?"

How could he tell his dying father of fair Madelaine, who had nothing but her wonderful beauty and her pure heart and soul?

Robert Earle's face was white with emotion and his lips quivered, perceptibly.

A sudden inspiration leaped into his troubled eyes.

He could temporize. There was no need to tell his father the whole truth. He must die in peace.

"My dearest father," he said, caressing his pale brow, "you know I would do almost anything on earth for you."

"Heaven bless you, my boy!" came from the white lips in almost a whisper. "I shall die happy now—Belvidore is saved."

"I knew you would not fail us," spoke his mother in glad tones. And Robert felt he had done right in retaining his secret. There might be another way to save Belvidore.

His father's dim eyes drooped heavily—a look of repose came over his death-like features. He opened them again and called for Roberta. She bent over him, and kissed his pallid brow.

Half an hour later Edward Earle bade each one a tender farewell; and a few minutes more left them to mourn his peaceful death.

V.

On the day after the funeral, Robert found his mother in their private park among the blooming flowers.

Her crape mourning dress, and countenance, and tearful eyes, touched him deeply. He went up to her and kissed the pale face.

With his eyes on the beauty of flowers and fountains, on the tall spreading trees, and the glitter of green, all the passionate love for Belvidore swelled in his heart, and he felt he would rather suffer the pangs of near death than lose his beautiful home.

"Mother," he said, almost abruptly, "tell me—is there no other way to save Belvidore than with a woman's money?"

"No other way," she replied. The woman wishes it, Robert, so there can be nothing mean about it, and Gladys is the loveliest—"

"My dearest mother," he interrupted, "never mind Gladys Haywood now,—I have something else to say to you. I have just received a letter from America—"

He intended to tell her then and there that he loved beautiful Madelaine, and was betrothed to her, but the look of terror on his mother's face drove the words back—he could not utter them.

She saw the writing on the delicate envelope which he held in his hand.

Her voice trembled, and her white lips quivered, as she cried, "Robert, my son, it can not be—oh, it can not be!" and fell fainting into his arms.

If this outburst of feeling was caused by a letter, what would have happened if he had told her all.

How he loved his dear mother; and when she opened her eyes, it was natural he should do all in his power to comfort her.

Robert Earle first met his cousin Gladys after his return from abroad at Mrs. Haywood's dinner party.

She was standing by the draped window in the spacious drawing room—a tall slender girl with proud bearing and a dainty figure.

A rich dress of pale blue fell in graceful folds around her, leaving bare her finely moulded arms and neck, a perfect white throat, and peerless shoulders from which a shower of fine lace seemed to fall.

She had a fair high bred face with full red lips, brilliant blue eyes, and a mass of golden hair clustered in waving lines about her shapely head.

She looked so beautiful in her delicate dainty loveliness, that Robert stood watching her for some minutes in silence before he spoke to her.

"Is this cousin Gladys so wonderfully changed?" he asked reaching her side. "I scarcely should have known you had I met you elsewhere."

Gladys turned—there was a moment's pause—then smiling with graceful movement, she held out her hand.

"I think I should have known you, Robert, any where," she laughed, "tho your hair is considerable darker and your features more regular."

"Shall I accept this as a compliment, Gladys?"

"You may if you wish," she returned, her face full of warm blushes and bright smiles.

She expected to see her own happy thoughts reflected on his handsome face, but a shade of sadness swept over it instead, and a far off look came into his eyes which she could not divine.

The gorgeous drawing room was brilliantly lighted, and the dinning room was dotted here and there with vases of rare flowers. The music was harmonious and refreshing, while witty conversations reigned supreme round Mrs. Haywood's festive boards.

When the last of the guests had left the house, Gladys was soon alone with her maid in her room.

Never did she look more lovely as when her unbound hair fell like a shower over her white shoulders. Her beauty needed no ornament to add to its imperial charm.

She dismissed her maid, and sank back in her easy chair.

"How handsome he has grown," she mused "and how I have loved him all these years! Should he lose home, position, everything, and be penniless tomorrow, I should still love him. He does not love me; yet he is courteous and kind. But he will love me!" "I am glad," she went on, triumphantly, "I am young and fair. I am glad I can give him wealth. I am glad I can give him Belvidore." A sweet smile played round the rose-bud mouth, as she still sat in meditation. "I wonder when he will speak—his mother thought it would not be long."

Not a shadow of doubt crossed her mind. She did not know this man had given to another the love of his life, and had promised to marry her.

"Robert," said his mother, the ensuing day, "I am so pleased to see you admire your cousin Gladys."

"What man could help admiring Gladys Haywood, mother? She is lovely beyond comparison, and as good as she is beautiful."

But in his own heart he declared she was not Madelaine.

Had Gladys been less gentle, less innocent, and not such a queen of beauty, it would have been easier for him not to admire her.

He read truth and honor in her fair face, and tender affection in her clear eyes; and had he never met Madelaine he could have lavished his whole heart on this fair woman.

"I am so happy, Robert," said his mother that evening when he bade her good night. "All will be well, and our troubles will soon be ended."

He thought it would be cruel to destroy her gleam of happiness even by a single word.

VI.

The night of Mrs. Stanley's reception was one that Robert Earle never forgot,—the night on which the greatest battle of his life was fought.

He was driven to the Haywood house, and ushered into the reception room to await the coming of Gladys and her mother. It was not long before a woman swept in so lovely that her beauty dazzled him.

Her superb figure was draped in white satin and lace, a necklace of diamonds encircled her white throat, and her sweet face marvelous in its coloring was radiant with smiles.

Soon Mrs. Haywood joined them, her rich dress hanging in simplicity over her well preserved figure.

When Robert placed the light wrap round the white shoulders of his cousin Gladys, he trembled before the fire of her great loveliness, and the thought flashed in his mind, he had to speak but a word, and this fresh young beauty was his.

As they entered the exquisitely decorated room in Mrs. Stanley's home, he noted the sensation she made.

Even his pretty sister Roberta in her dress of pale pink and pearl ornaments was compelled to step aside, and give place to this vision of imperial loveliness.

In a short time she was surrounded by a crowd of admirers all anxious for a word or a smile.

As Robert and Gladys walked thru the conservatory envious eyes followed him, and many would have given all they possessed to have taken his place; but her sweetest smiles and tenderest glances were only for him. He could not help feeling flattered.

Most of the guests did not remain late.

As Gladys and her mother passed out into the bright starlit night on the arm of Robert Earle, his thoughts went back to America, and the beloved face of his promised wife.

When the luxurious carriage stopped before the Haywood Mansion, Gladys wondered if he would say a tender word to her before bidding them good night.

She smiled bewitchingly into his face as she held out her hand.

He took it courteously, and raised it to his lips, then recovering himself, he merely said, "Good-night," to both of them, raising his hat, and then disappearing in the moonlight.

Four months had passed since the death of Edward Earle.

Robert had thought of the two remaining months a thousand times, and shuddered as he thought of the cost of redeeming his grand home.

He loved truth and honor, but was compelled to wear the semblance of untruth; he was betrothed to one woman and was compelled to appear as the betrothed of another.

Circumstances seemed to be mastering him.

His face was losing its comeliness and was growing haggard from inward pain.

The day after Mrs. Stanley's reception he received a letter from Madelaine, telling him how she loved him, and how she missed him. She was still true, and longed for his return.

He knew she would share the most bitter poverty with him, but what could he do to support her?

He tried, but failed to fancy his proud mother and sister living in a genteel house with scarcely the comforts of life.

And it seemed he would rather die than see Belvidore sold.

How swiftly the time was passing.

Should he ask Gladys to name a day for their marriage, and by so doing secure his beautiful home, happiness and peace for his mother and sister?

Or should he save his honor, and tell Madelaine when he would return to wed her, and be ready to plunge in the struggle of life for a living?

Her letter was so tender and true, so full of her lofty soul. Her heart would surely break were he false to her.

"God help me!" he prayed, "and lead me not into temptation."

"I will not sell my honor for gold," he cried, almost aloud. "Her sweet letter has saved me. Thank Heaven the spell is gone. The grand home must go. He would return to Madelaine."

"Why put it off any longer?" he reasoned. "I might as well go now as any time. Should I remain here, my resolutions may weaken under the magnetic power of beauty and gold."

In a few days he would leave "on a matter of business."

He would allow his mother and sister to enjoy their happy dreams a few more weeks.

When he had married Madelaine he would write and tell them all.

He and his bride would settle somewhere in America; and in time he would build a new home, not like Belvidore, far from it, but a neat cottage where love would reign supreme.

VII.

Belvidore was full of bustle and excitement.

Robert was leaving suddenly. He did not say where he was going, simply going on a matter of business. His face was fixed and pale, and he moved about like one in a dream.

He dare not bid any one a suspicious farewell. He dare not meet Gladys again before he should go.

He gained the steamer a few minutes before it sailed.

When it touched the shores of Madelaine's native land, a happy light came into his eyes, and a longing in his heart. All the sweet memories of that small village rose afresh in his mind.

Would he find her again somewhere near the cliff? He felt assured she would welcome him warmly.

After adjusting his toilet in the same room he occupied before at the Holland House, he went out in search of his beloved Madelaine.

As he walked down the avenue that led to the cottage on the hill, he caught a glimpse of white thru the branches of the trees in the woods near by.

A flush of pleasure spread her face as he came up to her. She held out both her hands to him.

"Is it really you, Robert, or am I dreaming?" she asked.

"It is Robert," he said. "Tell me I am welcome."

"You know that," she responded, resting her brown head against his bosom. Pressing her close to him, he kissed her with passionate tenderness.

He then led her to a familiar nook.

"Robert," she said, taking a seat beside him, "your face is changed. You look haggard and care worn. What troubles you?"

He looked at her a moment in silence.

She saw his countenance assume a sudden perplexity.

"What is it, my love," she questioned tenderly.

"Something must greatly grieve you to cause such a change."

"Let me share your sorrows as well as your joys," she pleaded.

"Madelaine," he said and there was a touch of sadness in his voice, "I had planned to take you to England, and make you mistress of Belvidore. I had hoped to lavish wealth, luxury upon you; and it grieves me I can give you nothing but poverty, at least for the present. She looked at him wonderingly, unable to comprehend him.

He told her all that had happened while he was home.

How he had found his mother and sister in the deepest sorrow; how the dark cloud over his beautiful home was revealed to him; told her of the terrible struggle in his mind while father lay dying—of his father and mother's plan to save Belvidore.

He cared nothing for himself, he told her, but for his mother and sister.

"It will break my mother's heart," he said, "when Belvidore is sold."

As she listened her face grew pale—paler.

"Tell me" she said, gently, "what are you going to do, Robert."

"Marry you first, my darling," he answered.

"And then?" she said, in almost a whisper.

"We will settle here somewhere in America, and build a new home. Should you mind being a poor man's wife, Madelaine?"

"No, I should not mind that at all with you, Robert. I have been poor all my life."

A silence fell between them broken only by Madelaine's voice.

"How well you love me Robert."

He wondered a little at her strange manner.

He drew the lovely face to him, and kissed her again and again.

She unclasped the warm loving hands. She rose and stood before him. The expressions coming and going on her face he never forgot. Her clear dark eyes looked into his.

"I shall treasure every word you have spoken—every tender caress but I shall never marry you—I shall never be your wife.

I love you too well, Robert, to strip you of home, wealth, position; drag you down to poverty, and send you disgraced into exile. Heaven forbid that I should break your mother's heart, and ruin your sister's life. Your duty, Robert, is to marry your cousin, save your home, your mother and sister's happiness, and in time you will love your wife."

As one dazed with sudden pain Robert Earle looked at the lovely face pale with emotion, lofty in its noble resolve.

With a deep groan he buried his face in his hands.

She drew nearer to him with tearful eyes, and sat down beside him.

"It is hard for me, too" she said. "I shall suffer all my life." "Say goodbye to me, Robert, the sun is almost down. Oh, my dear lost love, goodbye!"

She unclasped his loving arms and passed out of them. She heard a low cry,—but dared not look back. On she sped thru the woods, and up the hill to her home.

VIII.

Robert Earle returned to London in due time.

During his absence all the household of Belvidore were ill at ease, and longed for his presence again.

His mother and sister would look repeatedly in the distance for a glimpse of his coming, while Gladys meditated day and night—"would he ever come back, and would he ever tell her of his love."

Their joy knew no bounds when he made his appearance one rainy day. It was dreary without, but within all was peace and sunshine.

Gladys greeted him with open arms, and he fell into them like a weary child seeking rest.

If he were to marry her why put it off any longer? So he asked her to name the day.

She could not perceive why he was not happy, but reasoned he was still mourning the loss of his father. She was ever hopeful that in time his grief would wear away, and he would be happy again in her great love.

The tenth of November came at last, and a quiet marriage was solemnized at the Haywood Mansion—a marriage that was afterwards discussed all over London. It was such a simple but beautiful affair.

The lovely bride was radiant with love and happiness, but many noted the pale, worn face of the bride-groom.

After traveling extensively thru France and other countries, Robert and Gladys returned to their delightful home, Belvidore.

Robert could never put aside entirely the image of Madelaine from his heart, but was ever faithful to Gladys. She was so kind, so sweet, so good. She had given him her only love, she had given him Belvidore.

He would devote his whole life to her, and execute, if possible, her every whim and desire.

The early morning drives with her husband were a source of great pleasure to Gladys, but her heart was more joyous when winter was budding into spring.

One bright day in May, Robert was gathering for her some wild flowers in the woods, and she accepted them with all the delight of an innocent child.

On their return he lifted her from the carriage with great care, but so absorbed was she in caressing the treasured bouquet, she did not observe the large stone in her pathway.

Suddenly she stumbled and fell!

With a fearful cry, Robert raised her from the ground, and tenderly bore her into the house.

A great anxiety seized the household.

The great London surgeon was hurriedly called. On arrival he bent over her with grave doubts.

Every possible care was tendered her, but all efforts were in vain to save her and her unborn child.

Gladys saw the gloom on the faces of those about her, their anxiety, and unrestrained tears.

"Am I going to die, Robert?" she asked. He could not answer her, but bent and caressed her hair, and kissed her pale face.

"Robert," she cried, "I have to leave you! Let me die in your arms."

He drew the fair head upon his breast, and sobbed aloud in his anguish.

"Are you weeping, dear, because I have to die?" He pressed her closer to himself.

"Then you love me, Robert?"

"I love you, my darling wife," he cried in a broken voice.

A happy smile illumined her face and a sweet joy reigned in her heart.

"Others will love you, Robert, but none will love you like your true Gladys.

"Promise me, my dear husband, you will not forget me."

"I promise, my darling," he said tenderly.

The golden head fell, the white hands clung to him no longer, the pale lips were still, and Gladys Earle was dead.

Two years have passed since Robert Earle's wife was laid away in the beautiful cemetery not far from Belvidore.

He had mourned for his lovely wife sincerely; but in his lonely hours his mind would wander back to the cottage among the hills, to Madelaine Carson—

"Did she still live, and did she still love him?"

He would write to her that very day.

Robert had often spoken to his mother and sister of beautiful Madelaine, of her lofty soul, and the great sacrifice she made for their happiness.

It was early spring when Robert Earle made his third voyage to America; but this time he returned to England with Madelaine as his bride.

His mother and sister received her graciously, and with loving hearts.

Her mother had died a year ago.

Robert and Madelaine traveled thru France and Switzerland for nearly a year before returning home.

The new mistress of Belvidore was greatly admired. Her American style of beauty captivated the heart of the English world, and she soon became one of the most popular women of London.

Tho she and Robert preferred Belvidore to any other place of residence, they ever cherished it in their hearts as a sacred gift from his first wife, Gladys.



THE SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER

On the night of her eighteenth birthday Mamie stood before the full-length mirror which occupied the space between her boudoir windows. It reflected a tall, neat figure, dark brown eyes, hair of the same shade, and a complexion whose exquisite blending of pink and white was perhaps in some degree owing to art, but art so skillfully concealed that it was almost impossible to detect it. A rich, cream-colored silk, trimmed with expensive lace, adorned her faultless figure, while diamonds sparkled here and there and a necklace of the same encircled her white throat.

"There, Miss Foster," she exclaimed, stamping her little foot upon the soft velvet carpet, after her toilet had been completed. "You look brilliant enough to capture the heart of Arthur Wilson this time." And with this assurance she hastily descended the stairs.

When it was rumored that William Foster intended to celebrate his daughter's birthday, it was not a surprise, for he was the most prosperous inhabitant of the village, and was deeply interested in the welfare of his two lovely daughters than in all his acquired wealth.

Something of a sensation was created when his older daughter, then married to a wealthy banker of Cleveland, arrived in the village, for Mrs. Fennimore, formerly Grace Foster, was at one time the belle of Cedarville.

A close observer might have detected a resemblance in Mrs. Fennimore and her mother, as they sat together on the sofa in the spacious parlor, tho the daughter's features were more regular, her eyes a soft gray, and her luxurious hair was of the deepest black.

While discussing some of the advantages of Cleveland, Mamie entered, her costly diamonds glittering their best under the full light of the chandelier.

"How beautiful Mamie looks tonight," observed her mother, resting her arm on the back of the sofa.

Mrs. Fennimore gazed upon her charming sister with increasing admiration and delight as she walked across the room to open the piano.

It was almost half past eight when the crowd began to assemble.

A peculiar light shone in Mamie's dark eyes when Mr. Wilson was announced. He was one of the few men who could sit at the piano and sing without making himself ridiculous. He had a fine baritone voice, on which he spent a good deal of time and money, and, being a gentleman, sang like one.

He was not fond of such displays, but Mamie had asked him and he could not refuse.

There were then but few people in the parlor, almost everybody was out beside the sea, enjoying themselves under the light of the great moon.

He sang, "The Soldier's Daughter," because it was his favorite, and not from any sentimental longings or ideals troubling him just then, for he had acquired a comfortable cynicism regarding the tender passion. As for the rest, he was one of the professors at Bethany College, and was taking his summer vacation in the village and surrounding country, making the most of his boating and fishing opportunities.

"She is beautiful and fair,
Her eyes are blue and golden her hair.
She is courteous and holy,
Not of noble birth, but lowly,
Is the maiden that I love."

As he looked up his eyes rested on a willowy, graceful figure that just came in—a young girl—not more than sixteen, apparently, and to his face she raised a pair of blue eyes with a curious stare. The next instant she bent her head toward the young man beside her who stood offering her some beautiful red roses.

Wilson did not know that the young man was Charley Horton from the South.

She took the roses and looked back at the singer, who thought he seldom seen a fairer vision. From the first he became conscious that he had met his ideal, and his heart throbbed more quickly as he grew a victim to her charms.

"She is beautiful and fair,"
Her eyes are blue and golden her hair,"

he repeated to himself.

Wilson rose as from an impulse.

"Do you know that young lady? Will you present me?"

"Certainly. She is Mamie's dearest friend, who resides with her father on a small farm near the village. Her name is Ethel Lynn—"

"Present me," he said, almost impatiently.

Mrs. Fennimore gave him a steadfast look, laid her hand gently on his offered arm and crossed the room with him.

Mamie's eyes quickly followed them, and a look of keen disappointment drifted over her face when she perceived he was going to be presented to pretty Ethel. She longed to keep him at her side. So when Mr. Stanford asked her to sing one of his favorite songs, she felt indisposed; but, without a murmur seated herself, and sang in a manner that almost excelled Mr. Wilson's efforts.

"Ethel, my friend,—Mrs. Fennimore was saying,—Mr. Wilson wishes to be presented to you. Miss Lynn, Arthur."

As half waking from a dream, he heard the soft, low voice, like the murmur of the sea, as he breathed the scent of her roses.

"I am happy to meet you, Mr. Wilson. I am always glad to meet any friend of Mrs. Fennimore," turning to that lady with a frank, sunny smile.

"Thank you. Those are beautiful roses, Miss Lynn," declared Wilson, with something like jealousy rising in his heart.

Wilson alone discerned the dark shadow that spread over the other gentleman's face, and felt as tho he were intruding on someone else's pleasure or claim. Some trivial excuse was made, and the apparent lovers were left in the enjoyment of each other's society.

Whenever Wilson thought of Horton as his rival, fortune seemed against him, and he could not anticipate any further pleasure in his vacation. So he made up his mind to leave Cedarville before the end of another day.

Leaving Mrs. Fennimore in company with others, he finally went in search of Mamie; but finding her surrounded by half a dozen admirers, upon whom she was bestowing her sweetest smiles (as tho no secret pain was lurking in her heart), he escaped unnoticed to the opposite side of the room and began to make himself agreeable to some one who had recently entered unannounced.

"Mr. Horton seems very attentive to Ethel," observed Mrs. Fennimore the next morning, sitting at the window, as he and the young lady rode by.

"Yes," returned Mamie, her eyes following them with renewed interest, "he appeared very devoted last evening."

"There will be a neat little wedding in the rural home before many months," prophesied the older sister, after a few moments silence.

To this Mamie made no reply, her mind too deeply engrossed in perusing the announcement in the morning paper of Mr. Wilson's early departure.

Ethel accepted Horton's attentions with girlish innocence—tho somewhat inferior to him by birth and education, she possessed much womanly talent and power.

In beauty and sweetness of disposition she compared with her mother, after whose death she became mistress of her home. Her tender love for her aged father, coupled with her sunny ways, proved a source of great comfort in his declining years. He was then past sixty, and one of the brave men who fought in the war of 1812.

At the time young Horton was spending his vacation in the village and vicinity, Ethel went about her domestic duties busying her mind in dreaming over every pleasant hour they had spent together, every tender word he had spoken to her,

recalling the description he had given of his beautiful home in the South, the accounts of strange lands he had visited, in fact, found herself intensely interested in a strange young man. All this seemed so natural, she was so happy,—never stopped to question.

One morning, while watering the flowers, Mamie drove up in her splendid carriage. The moment Ethel saw her, she dropped her watering can and ran to meet her.

Mamie had come to spend the day and the girls were in high spirits.

Leaving the horse standing in front of the gate for Mr. Lynn to put in the stable, they ran off to the orchard.

"Are you going to the picnic, Ethel?" inquired Mamie, after they had seated themselves under a cool, shady apple tree.

"All of our best neighbors are going," she added, "and"—smiling with much assurance—"Charley Horton will be there."

Ethel's pretty face grew warm in its coloring at the mention of that name.

"Certainly. I wouldn't miss the picnic for worlds," she laughed. "Are Carrie Horne and Lillian Harmer going?"

"Yes, all the girls are going. By the way, Ethel, Lillian is soon to marry Ed Spencer."

"So I heard," was the complacent reply.

Here the girls chatted 'till dinner time, and it was nearly dark before Mamie returned to the village.

A few days later at Neil's woods, three quarters of a mile from Cedarville, and in sight of Ethel's picturesque home, the picnic was celebrated.

The day was bright and warm, and the merry voices of the neighboring lads and lassies were heard over rocks and hills and down in the valleys.

"Where did you get those beautiful ferns?" asked Lillian Harmer, approaching Mamie and Ethel.

"Fred got them for us," answered Mamie, with a mischievous smile, turning to Ethel for confirmation; but Ethel was pale and silent, and her head dropped upon Mamie's shoulder as tho she had fainted.

"Why, Ethel! What's the matter? You are not ill?" the two girls cried almost in the same breath.

In a few moments Ethel recovered herself and said she felt rather faint and believed she had better go home.

Mamie offered to accompany her, but Ethel assured her it was not necessary to spoil her fun—she would be all right again before long.

Sitting behind a large tree beside the little stream, two young men were talking in suppressed tones. Ethel recognized Horton's voice which was wont to give her a thrill of pleasure.

"Yes, she is pretty, but poor and uneducated. What am I going to do with her? Do with Ethel Lynn? Why nothing."

"Oh," replied the other philosophically, "You seemed so devoted. I thought you intended marrying the girl."

Horton responded with a laugh and then continued with a sneer. "I marry this country girl? What would my people say if I brought her home? I have no further use for her."

Unnoticed by her father, who was weeding the garden, Ethel entered the house and passed to her room, where, tho sad disappointment weighed her young heart, her resolutions were formed.

She would not allow the bitter sarcasm of anyone to crush her or even visibly dampen her spirits. She was a soldier's daughter and would bear her trouble bravely.

Tho she might always be poor, she would not always be ignorant.

She had made the best use of the educational advantages of the village and the future was before her. And what at that time seemed an almost overwhelming defeat proved an impulse to a noble achievement.

Four years sped rapidly away.

Mr. Horton, after spending a few months in his native city, set sail for foreign lands. Paris and Italy furnished him with pleasure unending, and instead of engaging in some manly pursuit, growing strong physically as well as intellectually, he was dwarfed by indolence.

Having mingled in gay society he indulged in late hours and unwholesome repasts.

Finally becoming weary of all these things, he turned his face homeward; and tho still young, looked prematurely old.

During these years there had often come to him scenes and incidents associated with that summer beside the sea and among the hills that surrounded a neat rural home.

Many a time he recalled the soft expression of her deep blue eyes and the fresh innocent face of her he had trifled with merely for his own amusement.

He felt no particular pangs of conscience for he possessed but little of that divine attribute—but longed for some such joy again.

After a comfortable voyage he stood upon the shores of his native land with the feeling of a traveler reaching his own country; but no one of all the crowd assembled on the wharf was there to welcome him. His mother and sister were too busily engaged in the round of fashionable amusements to go so far to meet a son and brother.

When but a short distance from one of the prominent cities, a slight accident occurred which delayed the train several hours at a small town which was the seat of a flourishing college.

As he strolled about the streets enjoying the flower-scented air of early June, he noticed a large crowd of people all traveling in one direction.

Curiosity prompted him to follow.

He soon found himself seated in a beautifully decorated hall. He presently learned that the day was commencement, and a class of young ladies and gentlemen were about to receive their diplomas.

A fine program was handed him. As he glanced over it he was startled at the sight of what appeared to be a familiar name, but that it could be any one whom he had known seemed so improbable that he dismissed the subject from his mind.

Shortly afterwards the exercises began. Each number was well rendered with skill and taste, but even a stranger might have discerned the feeling of expectation and enthusiasm toward the last.

Finally it was announced—"First Honor—"The Maid of the Hills"—by Miss Ethel Lynn."

Just then a queenly looking woman, plainly and neatly attired, stepped out upon the stage, and was greeted with a hearty round of applause.

After she had acknowledged the compliment, Horton recognized the Ethel he had known.

Tho the large audience became deeply interested in "The Maid of the Hills," no one knew that she was rendering so pathetically and so grandly the story of her own young life, save the stranger who sat among them, whom she had known four years ago.

Round after round of applause rent the air as she left the stage amid showers of flowers, and was encircled by the arms of her father, who felt this to be the proudest hour of his life.

Horton longed to join the crowds that afterwards gathered around Ethel to offer their hearty congratulations, but how dare he meet this girl whom he had treated so unmercifully.

His heart beat with pride as he thought of her grand achievements.

He walked moodily back to the hotel, and took lodging for the night.

He tried to sleep, but visions of a lovely, intelligent face, which so charmed him were constantly flitting before him, and the memory of those pleasant days spent with her four years ago haunted him, and for a time sleep was in vain.

Tomorrow he would call on her and entreat her pardon, his conceit allowing him to believe that she would hear his request.

Accordingly, in the afternoon of the next day, he entered the reception room of the house where Miss Lynn boarded and sent up his card.

As the lady came in and recognized him, he, with all his society lore, envied her the grace and dignity with which she met him. She was more beautiful and charming than ever, tho very reserved and forbidding. This made him the more furious, and before she could stop him, he was ardently declaring his love for her.

A gleam of withering scorn darkened her face which soon brightened into an expression of angelic sweetness as she

turned and greeted a grand and handsome man entering the door, who bent upon her such a look of tenderness as only exhibited a wealth of affection.

Quickly stepping aside and taking his arm with womanly pride and triumph she said, "Permit me to introduce my husband to whom I was married this morning."

An angry look was on Horton's face as he perceived his rival was no other than Arthur Wilson, whom he had met at Cedarville.

Mr. Wilson had been one of the professors at the same institute where Ethel finished her education, and where in time she learned more of his noble character and tenderly reciprocated his great affection.

Then, bidding Mr. Horton a chilling adieu, they passed out, leaving him to the companionship of his wounded pride.

After an hour's pleasant walk, Ethel and her husband boarded the train for their future home in the West, taking her aged father with them.

When comfortably seated, Ethel handed her husband a neat invitation that requested their presence at the marriage of her dear friend Mamie, to Mr. George Seymore.

"George was my classmate," he said, joyfully, looking over the note, "and I shall greet him as an old friend," and—turning to Ethel with a fascinating smile—"introduce my wife, the heroine of my favorite song,—*"The Soldier's Daughter."*



A JEWEL IN THE ROUGH

When Dave Hopkins was ushered into the world, the dull, dark winter was past. His projecting ears were not yet open to the voice of spring, nor did his prominent nose scent the breath of violets. His blue eyes did not observe the green budding here and there, nor was he conscious of the ray of sunlight that fell across the red hair that covered his tiny head.

To all who gazed upon him with the exception of his mother, he was anything but a pretty baby. Her eyes were blind to any defects that might belong to her child, for she loved him with all her heart, and began to plan at once to make his life happy and useful.

A few years after he was born, Mrs. Hopkins became a widow, and was compelled to exert her energies to make provisions for herself and child, which was scanty at best.

Dave and his mother were not familiar with what is called style, and she deeply regretted she could not clothe her boy like other boys of his age. Many a time his pants and coat were too short for him, and his ties faded and worn. He never seemed to realize the strange contrast between himself and other boys at school.

Whenever a lad would say to him, "Pull down your coat, Dave," he would smile thru those brown freckles on his good natured face, and jokingly reply:

"I wish I could, but I'm afraid it will grow shorter, if my legs don't stop growing longer."

He never put in a regular appearance at school, for many a time he stayed away to help his mother when she was indisposed, and was ever ready to bear the heavier burden and cheer the little widow with hope of him some day securing a "big job,"—and then she wouldn't have to work so hard."

At school he was far from being a favorite with the girls, but this did not trouble him so long as the little brown-eyed girl across the aisle shook her brown curls at him even if it were a sign she didn't want him even to look at her. He admired her pretty, sweet face, and any vibration from her sent joy to his heart.

While walking home one day, the smaller children met a dirty, ragged little girl coming toward them.

"Let's run her," said Mary Smith, "and make her afraid of us."

With one accord they ran toward her, hollering, "We're going to get you."

Dave was just behind these children, and heard and saw it all, but before he could speak a word in reproach, the little one had started back across the street in terror, stumbling over a stone that lay in the gutter.

"Stand back!" said he in loud command to the determined crowd, "till I pick her up."

"For shame!" he cried, pressing the little form to his bosom, "to frighten a little girl like that, and cause her to fall down. Don't you know she is some mother's dear little girl, who loves her as much as your mother loves you."

"Her face isn't clean, but maybe her mother is ill, and couldn't wash her today, and maybe she is poor, and can't buy her a good dress like yours."

While he was speaking, the crowd looked at him in silence, and the sweet faced little girl at his side did not shake her brown curls, but looked at him with something like tenderness in her eyes.

The timid child, not seriously hurt, but sustaining a slight bruise on the knee, clung to the boy who had uttered such kind words, still in fear of the larger girls.

Dave assured her they were sorry, and would not harm her, and promised to carry her home, if she would tell him where she lived.

He still held her in his arms as he rapped on the door.

"Here, madam," he said cheerfully, to the woman who answered his call, "is your precious baby. She's all right now. She just got scared at something and had a little fall."

And as he said this he tossed the child into the mother's out-stretched arms.

The woman looked Dave over from head to foot, and then burst out into a hearty laugh.

Dave thought she was overjoyed because he had delivered her child, but that of course was not the main reason. The sight of Dave was enough to make any one laugh.

As the years went by his looks were not improved, and his manner was still odd and somewhat awkward, but his big heart and soul was daily blooming afresh into manly consideration and kindness.

He was doing good work in a suburban town about fourteen miles from home at the age of twenty-three, and he and his mother were already enjoying the comfortable home which was almost paid for. In making the trip back and forth, he rode on the local train.

Early in the morning one day the car was crowded. As Dave entered and looked around he observed one half of a seat vacant in the middle of the car, the other half being occupied by an elegantly dressed lady.

Without any ceremony he sat down beside her, placing his dinner bucket between his feet for safe keeping, and then drew out his large bandanna and mopped off his forehead.

The lady drew her silk folds away with an unpleasant frown on her non-youthful face, and gazed out of the window.

She had been eating some candy from her large purse, but had "no desire to eat any more while such a specimen of humanity sat by her side."

And in her excitement and disgust she had picked up her little brown pocket-book instead of the remaining candy, which was brown in color, and threw it out of the window. Discovering the mistake, she gave a little scream that attracted Dave's attention.

"What's the matter, madam?" he suddenly asked, turning toward her. "Are you having any pain? If so, I have something in my pocket that will deaden it, if you will gracefully apply it to your becoming nose."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I threw my pocket-book out of the window by mistake. What shall I do? It contains my thru ticket and some change."

"Now, don't fret yourself, good madam," said Dave, rising, "I'm well acquainted with the engineer, and I'll ask him to back his engine, or wait for me till I go back and get your little article."

The woman was forced to give him a pleasant smile. Dave's desire was granted in the interest of the woman, and he soon came back handing her the unfortunate pocket-book. She snatched it gratefully, and throwing it into her large purse continued to gaze out of the window.

When the train had gone half the distance to Dave's place of work, he noticed a tired looking woman sitting in the seat opposite him with two children beside her, and a baby on her lap.

Presently the baby began to cry, and a suppressed sigh came from the bosom of the supposed mother.

"Let me relieve you of that boy, madam," said Dave, rising, and forgetting all about his dinner bucket. "I'm powerful good on quieting babies."

The woman was glad of the offer as she had traveled all night without any rest.

After giving the other children some candy he had in his pocket, he lifted the baby from its mother's arms and began to toss it up and down in playful glee.

The train had come to a standstill "for ten minutes for breakfast," as the brakeman had called out.

The hearty little laugh of the youngster arrested the attention of a young lady sitting a few seats ahead. She had heard the accommodating voice of the young man on several occasions in the car, but did not look around to note his appearance.

This time she turned and viewed him from head to foot in smiling surprise. How well she remembered the prominent features, but more than all his cheerful and obliging disposition.

"Just like Dave," she said to herself, only he is dressed in better style and taste. I wonder if he would know me," she went on, "I haven't seen him since our school days. I'll go out and get some bananas and offer one to the baby, and see if he remembers me," she decided.

Dave had taken a seat in front of the mother and was showing the youngster some marbles which he always carried in his pocket for the express purpose of quieting some child that might perchance cry on the train while he was going to and from his work.

Coming back into the car, the young lady stopped at the side of Dave and the baby, and in a sweet voice that Dave never did forget, offered the child a cake and a banana.

Dropping the marble, the little one reached for them while Dave stared at the lady with wide open mouth.

He recognized the fair face at once.

"Lizzie Rinehart! Where did you drop from?"

"I came from Winchester," she replied, "and now I am going home. I wasn't quite sure you would know me, Mr. Hopkins."

"My name is Dave just like it used to be," he said, shaking hands with her, "and I would know you anywhere."

"My name is Elizabeth now," she said with a twinkle in her eye."

"Sit down here, Elizabeth—Lizzie, I mean," he said, moving over.—"You always were Lizzie to me, and always will be."

And as she sat down beside him, they began talking over their school days, starting at the time she shook her curls at him as a sign she didn't want him even to look at her.

She also recalled the time when she was forced to look upon him in a more favorable light because of his good nature under trying circumstances.

He told her he had never forgotten her pretty face and hair, and often pictured her gathering flowers from a garden belonging to a neat little cottage. He said this with a mischievous gleam in his blue eyes.

He then informed her of his "fine job" in Spencerville near Wayfield, where he and his mother lived, and added that their house was nearly paid for.

"You always were a good boy to your mother and little ones," said Lizzie, casting a glance at the busy baby enjoying the cake she had given him.

"Do you know what sign that is?" he asked looking good naturedly in her brown eyes,—*"I mean the sign of being good to your mother and little ones."*

"No?" answered she, somewhat puzzled at the question.

"Why, it means the boy or man who is good to his mother would be good and considerate to his wife."

"Wife!" exclaimed Lizzie, in uneasy tones, "have you got a wife?"

"No," answered Dave, "I'm glad to say I have no wife, but am looking for one in a young lady that looks exactly like you."

Lizzie blushed, and toyed with her handkerchief, then looked up at him and burst into a quiet little laugh.

How could she marry conspicuous Dave, yet she could not deny, nor overlook his self-sacrificing soul. She recalled the different romances with other young men who were fairly handsome in appearance, but proved to be heartless in nature, and concluded that true happiness does not lay in outward appearances, but in a tender and considerate heart.

"This is so sudden, Mr. Hopkins—Dave," she said after a few moments reflection. I'll think it over. Come and see us,—mother will be glad to remember you. The next station is where we live.

The train was now moving on, and fifteen minutes later Lizzie was saying "goodbye" to Dave, and he was giving his promise to visit her in the near future.

The station beyond Miss Rinehart's destination was Spencerville.

As the dark headed brakeman called it out, Dave rose quickly and handed the baby over to its mother, saying, 'I'm sorry, madam, I'm not going farther to entertain the little fellow longer, but the fact is I must get off here to begin my day's work.

The woman thanked him, and told him she was very grateful for what he had done, and hoped God would reward him.

As she said this a vision of brown eyes and brown hair rose before him.

All at once he remembered his dinner bucket.

"Here's your tin pail," said the well-dressed lady still sitting where he had left her. "I took care of it! I think one good turn deserves another."

"Thank you, madam," said Dave politely, as he hurried out of the car amid the smiles of all the passengers.

His work seemed lighter than usual this day as he pictured a fair image gathering flowers in his own garden at home or fresh vegetables for the table.

It was not long before he accepted Lizzie's invitation to call.

Mrs. Rinehart remembered his unselfish and sunny nature with pleasure, and was glad to welcome him in her humble home.

As for Lizzie, she could not resist the powerful influence Dave was weaving about her, and gave him permission to visit her whenever he chose to do so.

Six months later, as he was pouring out a cup of tea for his mother at the table, he said her:

"It won't be long, mother dear, before you will have a daughter as well as a son. She will wash up the dishes for you, and help you about the work. Your headquarters will be in the cosy parlor, and you are not to leave it till you are called."

The mother smiled sweetly, and anticipated a pleasant life with her "new daughter," which was to be no other than Lizzie Rinehart herself.

From the first moment Dave presented her to his mother a warm feeling existed between them.

He was very proud of her when he brought her home as his wife.

Shortly after they were married Dave said to her in his usual playful manner:

"Your name is no longer Rinehart, but 'Sweetheart.'"

"Well, you may call me 'Sweetheart' in private if you choose," she replied, demurely, but in public I'm Mrs. Dave Hopkins."

Dave agreed to call her "Lizzie" when folks were around, but in private it came handy to call her "Sweetheart."

According to prophecy she proved herself a "true daughter." and would allow her mother-in-law to do just enough work to keep her in good spirits.

In after years, when toil and care entered her life, as it does every one's, especially, when children come to gladden the home, Lizzie would often say:

"I don't know what I would do without Dave. He is so good and kind and considerate, and helps me with the babies whenever he is home. I know good looks is not making him fat, but his noble soul is making me a better woman each day, and tho he's not a handsome husband, he's my 'Jewel in the Rough.' "



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